Beyond Development: Local Visions of Global Poverty

Rationale

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and accompanying SDGs have renewed international attention on combatting the root causes of global poverty. The SDGs have been depicted as a more inclusive and collaborative project than the preceding UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There is also a deep sense of ambiguity and contradiction pervading the 2030 Agenda. Despite a rhetorical emphasis on the inclusion and participation of developing countries in tackling poverty, many of the SDGs are underpinned by a narrow conception of poverty, as defined in terms of economic growth and other statistical indicators, which has been embedded within the development industry since the early Cold War.

This research network is a direct challenge to this crisis in the theory and practice of international development, and broader problems with the narratives behind economic analysis of poverty at both the local and global levels. The recent success of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty First Century*, the awarding of the Nobel prize in economics to Angus Deaton, and the success of a growing range of literature such as Anthony Atkinson's *Inequality*, all indicate a growing awareness and interest in the intractable global problems of inequality and poverty, and the need to revise and rethink our understanding of these problems, their causes and possible solutions.

This network builds on this, by capturing how poverty has been defined and narrated differently across a range of local contexts in ODA recipient nations; uncovering the different historical experiences of poverty in these localities; and investigating how these have in turn shaped different responses and solutions to poverty across the global South.

In doing so, the Network harnesses the unique insights and methodologies of the arts and humanities (in particular a focus on causality, long-term processes of change and local experiences) to inject diversity into our understandings of global poverty (and its solutions), capture local lexicons, and co-ordinate a global awareness of different strategies and approaches to poverty.

The Network not only aspires to help shift our perspectives of poor people as objects of policies to empowered actors, deconstructing historically embedded asymmetries of power, but to excavate the historic formulation of power asymmetries and to diversify the histories that represent global communities. In short, the Poverty Research Network is about uncovering the explanatory narratives behind the numbers.

Aims and objectives

1. To establish a transnational research community, promoted through a series of workshops in five carefully selected ODA recipient regions (Bangladesh, Brazil, the Indian Ocean World with an event in South Africa, Mexico, and Eastern Europe with an event in Slovenia), a major international concluding conference at the University of Warwick, and a dedicated project website.

2. Through this network, to investigate and document how different definitions and narratives of poverty and poverty reduction have been produced in specific localities across the developing world. This will provide people who have been the object of poverty discourses a voice and chance to share their experiences and ideas of solutions.

3. To harness the insights and methodologies of the arts and humanities, diversify the subjects and productions of history through engagement with the often silent majority of global communities, and initiate a change in narratives of poverty that have been created by economists and social scientists.
4. To bring these narratives and local knowledge into dialogue with contemporary international development policy and practice, through engagement with UK-based international development NGOs (Oxfam and Save the Children), and DFID.

5. To cross research boundaries, promoting collaboration and dialogue between disciplines, universities, research cultures, academic and non-academic stakeholders, policymakers, practitioners, and national contexts.

6. To disseminate research findings through academic publications, workshops, and the project website. This includes the production of a special edition of the peer-reviewed journal Social History. A provisional commitment to publish this special edition has been confirmed, which will be edited by the Principal Investigator and publish the findings and experiences of the Network.

7. To generate public awareness of the project’s work through a range of channels, including a dedicated social media platform and online website and forum, a regularly updated online blog, a series of exhibitions to be held in tandem with the project partner workshops, and an exhibition to be held at the University of Warwick in conjunction with the concluding international conference.