

## REVISITING THE DEFINITION OF POVERTY

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### ABSTRACT

Defining poverty, how it could be measured and alleviated have always been contested issues. Over the decades, different authors have proposed different definitions and measurement methods that have been applauded for a while before being discarded as inadequate. This paper examines some definitions of poverty in detail and argues that the way poverty has been defined over the years has influenced the kind of poverty alleviation initiatives that have been designed and implemented. The paper further argues that these poverty alleviation initiatives have been temporal and unsustainable because they have been trying to solve a wrongly defined concept. The prevalent definitions of poverty would best be described as fruits of poverty, rather than poverty itself. This paper will, therefore, examine these definitions of poverty and how these definitions have ill-informed the current ineffective and unsustainable poverty eradication strategies. It will then put forward a new definition of poverty that came out of a qualitative, rights-based approach to participative action research, which was a part of a Ph.D. field study, conducted in rural Malawi and its implications.

**Keywords:** Poverty; Poverty Alleviation; Poverty Eradication; Sustainable Development;

### INTRODUCTION

The many different, and sometimes conflicting, definitions of poverty are an indication of the obscurity of poverty (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006; Slim, 1995). There are different views on how poverty should be defined. Some writers have tended to favor social definitions, while others have preferred statistical or political definitions. However defined, there is a consensus among researchers and technocrats that the definition that is assigned to poverty forms the basis on which interventions are drawn (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). For instance, a political definition necessitates political interventions to dealing with poverty. Similarly, economic definitions inevitably lead to economic interventions. The “what” points to the “why”, which informs the “how”. Increasing poverty trends in the face of billions of dollars spent on poverty alleviation programs are a worrisome development. Could this disturbing trend be an indicator that we are trying to solve a wrong problem, which resulted from a wrong diagnosis? Misdiagnosis is costly and, in some instances, can lead to irreversible fatal consequences. Therefore, revisiting the definition of poverty, at this moment, is a necessity and could make the difference between death and life for the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

In recent years, it has come to the realisation of the donor community that while billions of dollars have been spent on social welfare programmes in developing countries, poverty continues to increase (UNDP-HDR, 2005). While some institutions like the World Bank (2008) claim that there has been some substantial economic progress at the global level, it has been only

a few powerful and influential groups and nations that have benefited. Indeed, the rich continue to get richer while the poor continue to get poorer (AWID, 2003; UNDP-HDR, 2005). The majority of the population in developing countries (in some cases as high as 65% of the population) continue to live below national poverty lines (UNDP-HDR, 2005). As a result, the economic redistributive functions of most social assistance programmes have been questioned and calls made for more effective social assistance policies that help tackle the growing trends of poverty world wide, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP-HDR, 2005; Minter, 1992).

Over the centuries, critics of the current poverty alleviation and international aid programs have been skeptical of the approaches used to end poverty (Minter, 1992). Indeed as a credit to their critique, most aid and poverty alleviation programmes have not benefited the most vulnerable and disadvantaged poor (Minter, 1992). Furthermore, most poverty alleviation programs that have been implemented have tended to have temporal results, which vanished with the winding up of the projects.

However, it is worth noting that the approaches used to eradicate poverty are a direct result of what has been perceived and defined as poverty. The definition points to the “causality”, which then “directly influences the design and implementation” of alleviation strategies (Oracle Thinkquest, n.d.). To this effect, the problem is not necessarily the approaches used to eradicate poverty, but rather the actual definition rendered to poverty. There is, therefore, a critical need to take a fresh look at what poverty is, which might in turn point to a different set of causality. This shift would inspire a new set of initiatives that will possibly, sustainably, eradicate poverty.

## **DEFINITIONS AND MEASUREMENTS OF POVERTY**

As mentioned above, defining poverty and how to measure it has been a huge challenge for development practitioners, researchers, governments, multinational corporations and non-government organisations (Saunders, 2004; Noble, Ratcliffe & Wright, 2004; Ratcliffe, 2007). In part, the problem has been exacerbated because of the elusiveness of poverty as a concept. Largely, it has been conflicting political agendas, ideologies and country specific contexts that have informed and guided the debates about finding a suitable definition and measurement of poverty (Saunders, 2004; Minter, 1992). Therefore it can be argued that the emergent definitions of poverty have been a product of the interests championed by the defining groups. It follows then that the definitions of poverty and the subsequent poverty alleviation strategies that flow from them have not always been in the interest of the poor themselves but rather have operated in the interests of the regimes and organisations purporting to be involved in poverty alleviation. As earlier stated, the “what” has direct implications on many other factors, which, unfortunately, also meant that the measurement of poverty had to be in line with the coined definition (Oracle Thinkquest, n.d.). To this effect, by one measurement, a person would be described as poor and yet by another, he would be regarded as not poor, yet without a slightest change in his personal circumstances.

For instance a more acceptable definition of poverty in the European Union is “Persons, families, and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural, and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State to which they belong” (European Commission, 2007: 5). This definition focuses on the individual entity,

like person or groups of persons, whose level of resources would “exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life” deemed acceptable by a member state. This definition is problematic because it assumes that it is okay to be under some conditions, however deplorable as long as the member state has not declared them as such. This definition abrogates responsibility by focusing on a less contentious issue of “person” or “group of persons” in a member state.

Poverty, however, is not what the member state says or thinks, or what a particular culture accepts. Poverty is poverty, regardless of one’s geographic location. Poverty has everything to do with the dignity of the human spirit in particular conditions and not what is considered politically correct or culturally acceptable. I will now provide some examples of definitions and measurements of poverty.

There are a number of broad categories recognized in literature into which definitions of poverty can be grouped. Some of these broad categories include statistical definitions, income-based definitions, living standards definitions, political definitions, capabilities definitions, expert-derived and ordinary people-derived definitions, and social definitions of poverty (Saunders, 2004; Noble, Ratcliffe & Wright, 2004; World Bank, 2003(a); UNDP-HDR, 2005). Some researchers and development practitioners have also argued that poverty definitions are historical and can only be seen as true in their particular era (Saunders, 2004). In some instances however, the distinction between some of these broad categories is blurred and largely arise based on one’s perspectives and agenda, for instance, statistical and expert-derived definitions as discussed below. While it is not the intention of this researcher to go through all of these broad categories of definitions in detail, a few will be touched upon here, particularly, those with direct relevance to the current paper.

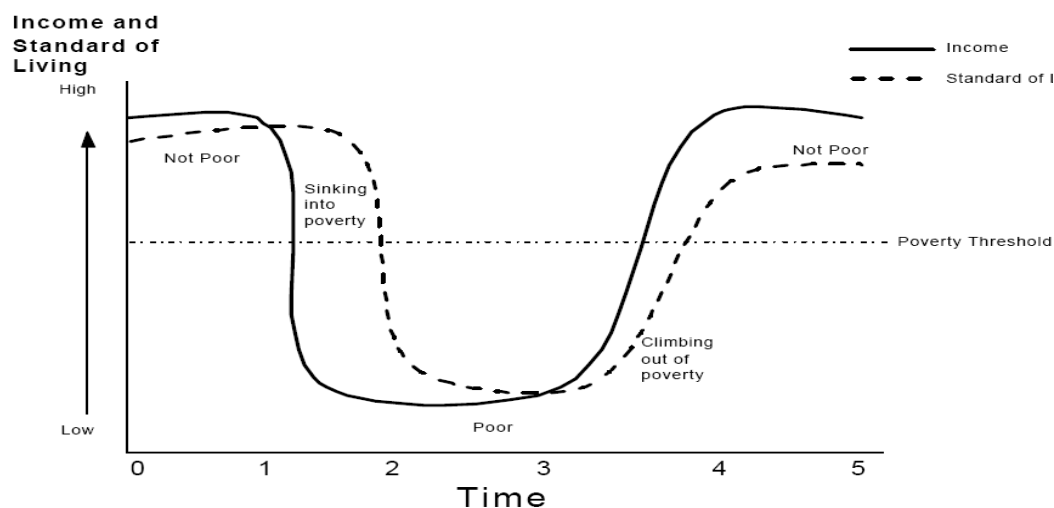
### **STATISTICAL DEFINITIONS OF POVERTY**

Statistical definitions refer to definitions of poverty that tend to use figures, numbers and percentages to define poverty (Saunders, 2004; Noble, Ratcliffe & Wright, 2004). These statistics could for example, be economic or the lowest stratum of a population or social strata. Examples of statistical definitions of poverty include the definition used by the World Bank. The World Bank defines poverty as any income below US \$1.25 a day for the poorest countries and US \$2 a day for poor developing countries (Ravalion, 2003; UNDP-HDR, 2005; Noble, Ratcliffe & Wright, 2004). This means that the World Bank is bound to use different poverty lines to define poverty depending on country specific contexts. Specific countries also use this approach to define poverty. For example, highly industrialized countries like Japan, the UK and the USA tend to put their poverty line at US \$14 or US \$26.19 a day (Townsend, 1990:5 cited in Ratcliffe, 2007; Oracle Thinkquest, n.d.). Whilst these examples look at poverty in terms of amount of dollars needed per day there are others that prefer a percentage of the population or social strata. For instance, if one ranks all the income levels of the entire population, it is sometimes deemed that the lowest 10% or 5% is poor (Noble, Ratcliffe & Wright, 2004). In this approach the main focus is not on the amount of dollars available to the individual in a day but rather as long as the person falls within the lowest end of the social strata, they are deemed to be poor.

Influential writers such as Rowntree (1910), Gordon (1989) and Townsend (1979) also define poverty based on one’s income and ability to meet a particular standard of living. Rowntree (1910) defined poverty as a “situation where the total earnings of

a family are 'insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency'" (cited in Thomas, 2008:3). Perhaps of particular interest are the concepts of income and standard of living as propounded by Gordon (1989), in which he uses these two concepts to demonstrate the dynamicity of poverty (refer to Diagram 1 below). He argues that caution has to be taken when measuring poverty because some households could be going through a transition phase. He argues that at this transition period, some households may have a high income but a low living standard while others may have a low income but a high living standard. In both cases the status of deprivation or wellness is a matter of time. This understanding of poverty is important because it demonstrates fully how the dynamicity of poverty could affect its definition and measurement. Gordon (1989) argues that if an individual or household has a higher income than their standard of living and should the income start falling, the standard of living will take longer to start falling. Both will continue to fall until the individual or household gets below the poverty line. When income goes up or increases due to finding employment, the household's or individual's standard of living starts to follow suit. However there is a lag between the income rise and subsequent increment in the standard of living. Gordon explains that the lag occurs because of "lag between starting work and getting paid" (1989:3). However, it could also be argued that this lag could be viewed in terms of the time it takes to change one's life style. Living standard is a cultural construction which comprises a set of culturally accepted assets, dress code, attitudes and expenditure patterns (Cottam & Mangus, 1942). In some instances it may involve a change of housing or locations altogether. This takes time to build up and manifest, hence the lag between the sudden income increase and the slow rise in standard of living.

**Diagram 1: Relationship between Income and Standard of Living**



Source: Gordon, 1989

However defined, statistical definitions raise some questions because of the arbitrary nature of how these poverty lines are established. For instance, a person making US \$2.20 a day will be deemed as not qualifying to be defined as poor under the "US \$2 or below" a day definition. Some researchers have also observed that at the time when these figures were introduced

in 1990, the actual value of the US dollar was \$2.15 but was rounded down to \$2 (Townsend, 1990). Further to this, the value of the dollar has been declining over the years. It is now close to two decades since this value was imputed and therefore the same amount of money may not buy what it used to buy two decades ago. Although there is an attempt to justify economically why US \$1.25 or US \$2 a day, it is important to note that there are double standards being applied here. Indeed some people from rich and powerful states have their poverty lines pegged at US \$14 or US \$26.19 a day while those from the poor and weak states have their poverty line pegged at a dollar or two a day (Townsend, 1990). This sort of approach gives a wrong impression that some classes of individuals are deemed to thrive better in poverty than others. Townsend (1990) shared these sentiments. He argued that the definition used by the World Bank is too narrow and different poverty levels for different states have racist imputations. It can be argued that this observation and others are clear manifestations of unfair power relations within the capitalist system whose agenda is to serve the interests of the powerful states to the detriment of the less powerful and disadvantaged.

We have so far looked at the first category of definitions of poverty called statistical and we will now proceed to look at definitions coined by experts and those which take into consideration the views of ordinary people.

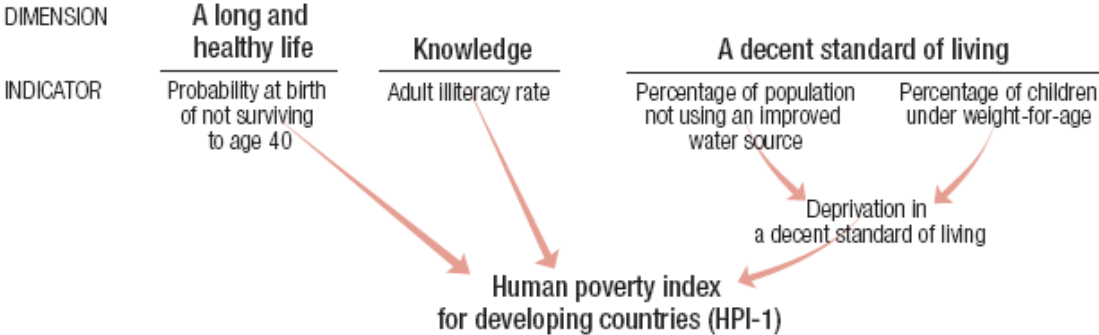
#### **EXPERT-DERIVED AND ORDINARY PEOPLE-DERIVED DEFINITIONS**

Expert-derived definitions of poverty are those definitions coined by development experts (Noble, Ratcliffe & Wright, 2004; Ratcliffe, 2007). These experts could be development researchers and practitioners, economists, social scientists etc. In principle, these expert-derived definitions of poverty attempt to use the latest available expertise, statistical models and knowledge to define poverty. Examples of expert-derived definitions of poverty could include the Household Subsistence Level (HSL) and the Household Effective Level (HEL) which were developed by Potgieter in 1980 and widely used in South Africa (Suchard, 1984; Ratcliffe, 2007; Slabbert, 2004). The Household subsistence level uses computer modelling to determine how much income a household requires to barely survive. However, this method for defining and operationalising poverty was criticized for not taking into consideration other household needs which were essential like medical expenses, education, savings and insurance (Ratcliffe, 2007). This criticism led to the development of the Household Effective Level. The poverty line using the Household Effective Level measurement was higher than the Household Subsistence Level because it included the household necessities that were initially left out.

The United Nations Development Programme (HDR, 2006:407) uses a range of indices to measure and define poverty. The aggregation of these indices is called the Human Poverty Index (HPI). The United Nations Development Programme defines the human poverty index as a “composite index measuring *deprivations* in the three basic dimensions captured in the human development index (HDI)—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living”. The Human Development Index is defined by the United Nations Development Programme (HDR, 2006:407) as a “composite index measuring *average achievement* in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living” (emphasis mine).

The human poverty index seeks to define and measure poverty using the above range of indicators. For example, life expectancy measures the probability at birth of not surviving to the age of 40, malnutrition of children under the age of five measures the percentage of children who are underweight, literacy measures the percentage of the population from the age of 15 years and above who are illiterate, and access to services measures the percentage of the population that has access to sustainable potable water (UNDP – HDR, 2007/2008).

The human poverty index for poor nations is calculated from three factors, namely, long and healthy life which is rendered as Life Expectancy, Knowledge which is rendered as Literacy and Deprivation of a decent standard of living which is a derivative of two functions; percentage of population not using improved water source and percentage of children under the weight-for-age (UNDP – HDR, 2007/2008). The UNDP presents this formulation with the following:



These examples are just some of the expert-derived definitions of poverty. As we can see above, experts use complex mathematical or statistical models to define and measure poverty. Complexity however, does not guarantee accuracy. By contrast, ordinary people-derived definitions of poverty are those definitions that take into consideration the perceptions of ordinary people (Narayan & Petesch, 2002; Ratcliffe, 2007). These ordinary people may range from those living in poverty to those who are not poor themselves. These perceptions are used to define poverty, measure poverty and construct poverty lines. One of the key products of the poverty perceptions by ordinary people has been a poverty line which is called the Perceptual Poverty Line (PPL) (Ratcliffe, 2007). The perceptual poverty line is constructed where the household’s actual income is equal to what the household considers as the minimum to make ends meet (Ratcliffe, 2007). However, it should be noted that this method of defining and operationalising poverty is subjective. Poverty researchers in South Africa found that when the household’s income has increased, the household’s perceived minimum amount to make ends meet also increased. When their income dropped, their perceived minimum amount to make ends meet also dropped (Ratcliffe, 2007).

Other examples of ordinary people-derived definitions of poverty are the Leyden Poverty Line (LPL) (Ratcliffe, 2007; Narayan & Petesch, 2002), the democratic definition of poverty and the Own Economic Welfare (OEW) which is established by asking a household to gauge their own position on a poverty ladder (Ratcliffe, 2007). I will only discuss the Leyden Poverty Line here and the Democratic definitions of poverty in the next paragraph as other examples of ordinary people-

derived definitions of poverty. The Leyden Poverty Line was developed by Goedhart et al in 1977 and was named after the place where it was first used in the Netherlands (Ratcliffe, 2007). Basically, the Leyden Poverty Line survey asked respondents an Income Evaluation Question (IEQ) where they were asked to indicate what they considered to be “an appropriate amount of money” related to each of the following six financial case scenarios: very bad, bad, insufficient, sufficient, good and very good (Ratcliffe, 2007). The amounts that the survey respondents indicated were then used to compute estimated individual Welfare Functions of Income (WFIs).

The developer of the Income Evaluation Question, Praang (1993) and Van den Bosch (2001) claimed that the Welfare Functions of Income were actually the “cardinal and interpersonal comparable measures of poverty” (Ratcliffe, 2007:38). Goedhart et al (1977) explained further that these adverbial labels ‘very bad’ to ‘very good’ are then “transformed into numbers on a zero-one scale identifying these evaluations with equal quintiles”. “In this way,” Goedhart continued “one obtains points on a graph of the individual’s welfare function” (quoted in Ratcliffe, 2007). Therefore using this method any household is classified as poor if its take-home income “falls below an income amount, which corresponds to a specific utility/welfare level measured by the welfare function of income” (Ratcliffe, 2007).

The democratic definitions of poverty tend to define poverty in terms of extent of participation in society (Ratcliffe, 2007). The focus is on whether the individual or household has what would enable them to fully participate in society. Critics of this approach have pointed out that this definition of poverty raises important questions like “what is full participation in society?” (Ratcliffe, 2007:40). Ratcliffe takes this question further by looking at the value behind the question: “Is the question on ‘normal’ (average) patterns of current participation or on views about what ‘normal’ should be (but isn’t yet) like?” (Ratcliffe, 2007:40). Therefore the major focus in democratic definitions of poverty is not on the process of defining poverty being democratic or participation in a democratic process like elections but rather whether a household or individual is able to participate in what the society defines as “socially essential”. Thus, this merely comprises a “definition of poverty in relation to the minimum living standards that the majority of the people believe to be essential...” (Gordon & Potantiz, 1997 quoted in Ratcliffe, 2007).

The Centre for Analysis of South African Social Policy (CASASP) adopted this method and conducted 50 focus group discussion meetings with a cross section of the South African people (Ratcliffe, 2007). The findings of the focus group discussion meetings were used to develop a list of socially accepted items and services that every household should have. Any household that did not have access to such items and activities was considered to be poor or deprived. Other initiatives were also employed to perfect this list of socially perceived necessities. One such initiative was a social attitudes survey conducted by The Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRCSA) in 2005. This list is currently used in South Africa as a benchmark in the measurement of poverty. This list was compiled from items and services that were defined as essential by at least 50% of the participants in the focus group discussions.

The above mentioned concepts and definitions of poverty share a common thread. They could be classified as economic-based, because they define poverty from an economic perspective. They view poverty as a lack of resources to live an

acceptable standard of life (Gordon, 1989). They view poverty as a lack of food, shelter, money, clothing, and other things necessary for life. The obvious poverty alleviation initiatives that have resulted from such an understanding of poverty have attempted to meet these needs. Indeed for decades, international aid organizations and national governments have concentrated their efforts on providing these needs to the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. To the disappointment of both the aid providers and the recipients, poverty has increased (Oracle Thinkquest website, n.d.).

A female village head, during one of the focus group discussions, described the above mentioned needs as “fruits of poverty” and not the actual poverty. The term “fruits of poverty” is a popular Malawian byword which may mean the ‘results of poverty’ or ‘manifestations of poverty’. The idea is derived from the fact that if, for example, one wants to deal away with a mango tree forever, it does not help to remove the young fruits each mango flowering season. One should simply cut the tree on the roots. In this statement, she referred to the tendency of aid organizations, which provide food each hunger season, instead of dealing away with the root causes of poverty once and for all. “Consequently, even if you deal away with the fruits of poverty for five years and that aid program phases out, we get back to square one...we find ourselves in a condition of poverty again” she said.

Could this disturbing trend be indicative of treating an ill-conceived problem? Surely, how many decades does it need to take to eradicate poverty? How much money would eradicating poverty require? Could we classify what has already been spent on various poverty alleviations and development initiatives as little or a drop in an ocean? After rigorous analyses of the nature of poverty in recent years, many development aid organizations and practitioners have begun to question the very definitions of poverty that are used (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). It has become a far too familiar trend that when a poverty alleviation intervention begins, the people become well off. And indeed it becomes a song in every boardroom and political platform that the intervention is having the intended impact. Many poverty alleviation program evaluation reports are awash with praises and statistics claiming unparalleled success. If these reports were correct, why do we still have millions of people still living in chronic poverty today?

The reality on the ground is that when a poverty alleviation program comes to an end, so do the benefits of the program. Immediately, the recipients find themselves in the same predicament they were in before the initiative was introduced. Lack of food, lack of clothing, lack of shelter, and other necessities of life become the norm again until another hand-out program will be introduced. Meeting their daily needs without changing their circumstances does not constitute sustainable poverty alleviation. Poverty has nothing to do with what they lack on a daily basis, but rather the crippling and dehumanizing circumstances which surround them and prevent them from meeting their daily needs.

## **TOWARDS A MORE ACCEPTABLE AND JUST DEFINITION OF POVERTY**

The definition of poverty is not a function of culture or which state someone belongs to. The definition of poverty is not about some political agenda. It is about the dignity of a human spirit and its inherent ability to better itself (Munroe, 2003). Any tendency to the contrary is not inherent but rather circumstantial and conditional. Therefore, poverty is not about a figure or amount of assets, but rather “an individual's inability to affect change in their lives...” (Kathleen McHugh, 2006, reported



on the Oracle Thinkquest website, n.d.). One participant during the focus group discussions in rural Malawi described poverty as a “state of disempowerment”. Poverty is about the circumstances in which poor people find themselves where they are so disempowered by the circumstances, most of which, unfortunately, are not of their own making.

Lack of food, clothing, shelter, and money is a manifestation of poverty and not the actual poverty. Poverty is the condition that makes meeting these needs impossible. “We all want to come out of poverty”, commented one participant, “but the problem is that we are surrounded by circumstances that do not provide us with any way out ...this state is what is called poverty”. Indeed it is inherent in a human spirit to better itself and the circumstance that makes it impossible for this to happen is what constitutes as poverty according to this participant.

A just and acceptable definition of poverty should be applicable to all people under the same circumstances without making hypocritical adjustments which have no basis at all. People across different cultures, races, and nations under similar circumstances should be able to identify with that definition of poverty. The litmus test, for a just and acceptable definition of poverty, is universality in its application. Therefore, regardless of culture, race, and country of origin, poverty is conditions that make it impossible to exercise an inherent trait to better oneself. Any such an inhibition of this “God-given human trait”, as was said by one participant, “constitutes a violation of human rights”.

During the focus group discussions, one group defined poverty as lack of access to opportunities and resources that they need to better their lives. They cited an example of a girl-child who was forced out of school in favor of a boy-child because the parents cannot afford to keep both in school. They went further to follow the life of this girl-child, who ended up getting married early. She found herself in a similar situation that her parents were in, that she has no access to opportunities and resources to change her circumstances. This locked her into an unstoppable downward spiral, taking future generations with her. Indeed, a lack of access fosters a conducive environment characterized by desperation because of powerlessness to change one’s circumstances.

Another focus group defined poverty as a “denial of meaningful participation in different development programs that would otherwise help us and our region develop and become self reliant”. “We are just asked to rubber-stump development programs that have been articulated by the government and NGOs without our input” said a participant. In effect, “we participate in helping the government and NGOs achieve their donor agenda and reporting needs, which do not benefit us at all”. Indeed being denied the opportunity to articulate one’s personal needs and use local knowledge to deal with those needs constitutes a violation of a fundamental inherent human trait. Poverty is, therefore, a violation of human rights.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMS**

As already alluded to earlier, it has come to the realization of donors in recent years that poverty continues to increase, despite billions of dollars being spent on poverty alleviation programs (UNDP-HDR, 2005). This trend is indicative of the ineffectiveness and unsustainable nature of current poverty alleviation programs. And as earlier stated, the “what” points to

the “why”, which informs the “how”. Therefore, the current poverty alleviation strategies are a direct product of the definitions of poverty that have been in use for the last five decades.

There has been an awakening, however, among development researchers and practitioners in recent years that there is something wrong with how poverty has been defined and the approaches currently used to deal with poverty. The United Nations has successfully advocated for a rights-based approach to dealing with poverty, which arises from a human rights perspective in defining poverty (UNCHR, 2005; Ultvedt, 2004). The rights-based approach has become one of the most important approaches to development, as evidenced by the writings of Ultvedt (2004) and others. It is its unique perspective and engagement with the marginalized individuals, themselves, that has made it more popular. As one participant said “The only person that knows poverty, is the one living in poverty and, therefore, he also knows how to get out of poverty”. All attempts by third parties to define poverty and how to deal with it are futile, as attested by recent poverty trends.

Therefore, poverty eradication and sustainable development is not about meeting needs, but rather creating a supportive environment for the realization and enjoyment of human rights. “What we need are not handouts, but to be empowered and opportunities” said a participant. “No person is better than another. We need equal access to education and loans. We want to articulate our own development projects and implement them. All we need is to be trained and empowered” one group rapporteur summarized his group’s discussions. Indeed, poverty is “the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development, to lead a long healthy creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem, and the respect of others” (UNDP-HDR, 1997).

## **CONCLUSION**

The above definitions of poverty are just a sample of various attempts by different countries, organisations, researchers and development practitioners to define poverty. As I mentioned above, there are different categories in which definitions of poverty could be classified. In this paper we have looked at examples of statistical and expert-derived and ordinary people-derived definitions. Considerable attention was paid to the development of poverty definitions in South Africa and the way the United Nations Development Programme has defined and measured poverty. Which ever way poverty is defined, it has direct implications on the design and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes and consequently, on sustainable development. It is in light of this direct implication that an exploration of these definitions was relevant.

Capturing the true meaning of poverty is important because it is the “what”, that explains the “why”, which informs the “how”. Sustainable poverty eradication initiatives and sustainable development depend on treating the root cause of poverty, and not the current approach of deflowering and plucking off the fruits of poverty in every fruit season. Poverty is a violation of human rights and it is by redressing these violations that poverty could be sustainably eradicated. Any attempts to provide handouts and articulate development programs, on behalf of the disadvantaged groups, are a fruitless effort that is leading to frustrations on both sides. Therefore, sustainable poverty eradication could only be achieved, firstly, with the recognition that poverty is a violation of human rights and, secondly, by empowering disadvantaged groups to change their own circumstances.

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