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Understanding and Combating Poverty :  
A Quest for Conceptualization, Measurement  
Indicators, Causes, and Empirical Methodologies

Khalid Ali El Amin

Working Paper 0338



ECONOMIC RESEARCH FORUM

**UNDERSTANDING AND COMBATING POVERTY:  
A QUEST FOR CONCEPTUALIZATION, MEASUREMENT  
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## **Abstract**

This paper reviews some selected conceptual literature on poverty issues and the various approaches to its definition, measurement, underlying causes, and empirical research methodologies used. The paper is divided into five sections of which the first, second, and third deal with approaches to the definition and measurement of poverty and implications on poverty reduction. While poverty definition and measurement have received sufficient research and discussion, the underlying causes of poverty have been rather under-researched. The fourth section reviews some of the literature on the causes of poverty including issues of economic growth and inequality. The fifth section is devoted to empirical methodologies adopted in poverty research and poverty assessment including advantages and disadvantages of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to poverty research. The paper winds up by concluding remarks after reviewing the literature on poverty.

## **1. Introduction**

During the past 10 years the old social problem of poverty has received renewed attention from scholars, politicians, NGOs, and international development institutions. Although poverty is common to both developed and developing countries, international attention has focused on poverty reduction in developing countries in which over one billion live on less than one dollar a day. National governments in developing countries are pressurized to provide poverty reduction plans to facilitate efforts of the international community to put eradication plans into effect. Parallel to this mounting attention, the literature on poverty has also witnessed an unprecedented upsurge resulting from wide ranging debates over the definition of poverty, its measurement, and causes as well as methodologies of poverty research and assessment. Expanding research publications and reports of international development institutions and NGOs have all added to the growing literature on poverty and contributed much to understanding the problem and developing potentially positive implications for effective poverty reduction future.

## **2. Absolute and relative Poverty: Some issues of Definition and Measurement**

The precise meaning of poverty and the criteria for its detection and measurement, in terms of correspondence between the abstract concept and empirical reality, has been subject of heated controversial debates over the last few decades. Different and varied connotation of the concept and different indicators to approximate it in reality emerged. Different groups of scholars have assigned different meanings to the concept; and what the concept embodies has evolved over time. For one group of scholars (Atkinson A.B, 1989:9-10; Webster A., 1989:17; Smith C, 1994:43) poverty is defined with reference to poor families categorized as those that do not have enough cash income to secure the minimum requirements of food, shelter, and clothing. The concept of poverty in this sense is understood in terms of minimum cash income that results in an inability to meet the minimum biological needs necessary for the acquisition of an acceptable level of wellbeing. A cut-off cash income figure necessary for the attainment of basic material needs is set as a measurement criterion of poverty; and draws the poverty line that separates the poor and non-poor in a society. It is also used to examine the extent to which poverty is prevalent in a society and to categorize groups of the poor according to the depth and severity of poverty. This approach, which emphasizes cash income in the definition and measurement of poverty, offers an absolute or fixed conception of poverty; however, it provides a measurement criterion, cash income, which is easy to measure and also 'objective' to some extent. Families with cash income falling below that cut off line are considered poor, targeted with safety nets, and receiving public support to maintain the minimum cash income as a means of poverty reduction.

The definition of poverty in terms of cash income falling below a particular minimum level, taken in the Western context, does not capture reality for a number of inherent shortcomings: i) expenditure on needs often does not reflect family cash income. Families could spend more than the cash income they earn either through borrowing or by eroding savings; thus, while cash income may fluctuate over time, consumption is kept fairly stable; ii) estimated minimum cash income set to represent the poverty line is rarely revised to incorporate changes in consumption habits and new individual or household needs that arise from socioeconomic and cultural changes in a society. Third, in many cases the cash value of family needs is not always adjusted to keep pace with inflation and with the rise in prices of the necessary goods and commodities purchased.

Subsequently, other scholars (Anand S and Harris, 1994: 226-31) have suggested the use of expenditure estimates as proxy for consumption to more adequately measure cash income and poverty. However, the use of expenditure criteria, as a proxy for cash income, is also fraught with difficulties. In the choice of a bundle of commodities necessary for subsistence and

wellbeing, individual preferences, needs, and consumption habits differ within and between families; also prices vary from one location to the next, making the determination of the cash value of required minimum consumption necessary for wellbeing difficult or inaccurate<sup>1</sup>.

When applied in the case of less developed countries, the definition and measurement of the concept of poverty in terms of cash income insufficiency (or other equivalent) to meet some basic material needs, faces additional problems. In many less developed countries, especially among rural communities, consumption could be reduced or increased through reciprocal inter- and intra-family transfers and mutual support mechanisms; thus, making cash income extremely difficult to reflect actual consumption. Moreover a significant part of the necessary means to sustain large sections of the population in countryside of less developed countries is met through domestic production, i.e., family production for domestic consumption. A large part of families' needs in developing countries, predominantly inhabited by rural cultivators, are met through the households' own production without entering into market circuits. In both cases, satisfying needs through inter- and intra-family mutual support mechanisms or through domestic production, cash income alone as a basis for the definition and measurement of poverty would be insufficient and unrealistic. In the first case, where reciprocal relations are significant, the degree of preservation or disintegration of these relations is important to consider besides cash income for more realistic and better understanding of poverty. In the second case, where only part of household needs are met through market transactions, domestic food production should be considered for assessing poverty in addition to cash income.

Nevertheless, major criticism leveled against the money metric approach to the definition and measurement of poverty is that the poverty line used to identify the poor from the non-poor in a society cannot be set without considering the socioeconomic and political context of this society. In other words, an absolute poverty line that disregards the standard of living of the non-poor in a society is inadequate. The relative conception of poverty, in which the standard of living of the poor measured in terms of deprivation of some *material attributes*<sup>2</sup> (be it cash income, expenditure, or consumption) and relative to that of the non-poor sectors in the same society, partly reflects this criticism. Thus, the relative conception of poverty accepts the attributes of poverty as the inability to attain the minimal standard of living; and also accepts the income indicator as a measurement tool. Yet, it differs from the absolute poverty conception in how the cutoff line between the poor and the non-poor is set. In the absolute conception of poverty, a cutoff line could be fixed by approximating the money value necessary for the acquisition of the *minimal material requisites regarded*<sup>3</sup> as necessary for a decent life. In the relative conception, the cut off line should be determined in relation to the standard of living of the non-poor in the same society.

The proponents of the relative conception of poverty contend that rather than having an absolute (fixed) poverty line, the cash income needed for the attainment of the minimal standard of living should be defined in relation to the standard of living of non-poor groups in the society. Defined according to the concept of relative poverty, the poverty line changes over time, as yesterdays' luxuries become today's necessities. It also changes from one country to another; and even differs from one location to the next within the same country.

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<sup>1</sup> There are numerous more criticisms cited against the consumption, expenditure and calorie intake measurements of absolute poverty that need not be recited in detail here. For details see (Alternatives, Four approaches Cite the Website.

<sup>2</sup> One understands this to be different from social as well as political and cultural deprivations.

<sup>3</sup> The normative validity of who establishes or determines what is necessary for the minimal standard of living which in turn means who defines poverty and who sets the poverty has been questioned. If it has been the norm that somebody else be it a bureaucrat, a politician or some expert sets the poverty line, it would be more appropriate that the poor themselves who experience poverty define what it is and the criteria for measuring it.

This has a number of major implications, which includes that setting a universal or national poverty line is extremely difficult if not impossible. Another implication is that policy action to reduce relative poverty necessitates the redistribution of income in a society. This means that, even with the increase in national income and the improvement of the material conditions of the poor on absolute poverty measures, their condition would not improve if non-poor groups still enjoy far better living conditions. To improve the conditions of the poor relative to the non-poor requires effecting a redistribution policy action in which income inequalities in a society are reduced, with the poor getting a larger share of the national income. Thus, unlike the absolute conception of poverty, relative conception requires that the poverty line be readjusted and redefined according to the prevailing economic conditions.

The quantitative or money-metric approach to poverty definition and measurement, in all its variants, whether using cash income, consumption expenditure, or calorie intake as measurement of poverty, has been criticized on a number of grounds: i) arbitrariness and subjectivity in deciding what constitutes a reasonable minimal standard of living necessary for wellbeing; ii) arbitrariness in setting the poverty line - the cut-off level of income, expenditure, or consumption that separates the poor and non-poor; iii) wellbeing involves more than what could be measured by income, expenditure, consumption, or calorie intake.

### **3. Relative Deprivations and Capability Approaches**

With respect to the above criticism, the quantitative aspects of cash income, consumption, expenditure, and calorie intake are inadequate for defining and measuring human welfare and wellbeing. This rests on the more fundamental criticism that cash income criteria as a measure of poverty (i.e., cash income insufficiency to meet basic biological needs) disregards that humans are social beings. Subsequently, a much broader definition of the concept of poverty, which conceives poverty in terms of relative deprivation, has been put forward. The relative deprivation conception of poverty takes into account a number of social and cultural considerations; which, in addition to basic needs (food, shelter, and clothing), include leisure activities, participation in social life, and keeping up with the standards of an acceptable life in a particular society (Webster A, 1989:20). Wedderburn (1974:4) considers relative deprivation “in an objective sense, to describe situations where people possess less of some desired attribute, be it income, favorable employment conditions, or power, than do others” (Wedderburn, 1974:4). The definition of poverty in terms of relative deprivation surmounts the difficulties associated with the conception of poverty in cash income terms. It covers, in addition to calculable cash income, qualitative non-calculable needs, the fulfillment of which is considered by individuals, families, and society as inseparable part of wellbeing.

Nonetheless and although superior to absolute and relative poverty conceived in quantitative terms, the definition of poverty in terms of relative deprivation is laden with complexity. The relative deprivation definitions of poverty have the advantage of situating poverty within the broader socioeconomic and political context; but the main difficulty of measurement remains how to measure social and political attributes that result in feelings of deprivation. Also, feelings of deprivation might relate more to the subjective nature of “desires”, expectations, and aspirations of people rather than to objective conditions. However, the feeling of deprivation by those lacking certain attributes always arises in relation to attributes possessed by others; thus, the feeling of deprivation in certain sectors of societies is associated with inequalities in those societies.

The strength of the definition of poverty as a relative concept; i.e., relative conditions of deprivation, lies in its incorporation of qualitative social and political needs as part of the necessary requirements for wellbeing in addition to quantitative or material requirements. The implication of conception of poverty as relative deprivation is that poverty could only be defined and measured within a particular socioeconomic, political, and cultural context taking

into account the specific social, political, and cultural characteristics of different countries and regions. Examining poverty in less developed countries has implications, as societies are characterized by intricate overlapping relationships between differing socioeconomic, political, and cultural value systems on the one hand, and economic activities on the other hand.

Despite the difficulty of answering the critical questions relating to the definitions and precise measurement of poverty, an approximate definition, which could bridge the gap between the absolute and relative definitions and the conception of poverty as relative deprivation, is Sen's human capability approach. The concept of capability is very close to conception of poverty as relative deprivation, but extends beyond defining poverty as failure to attain minimum cash income to defining poverty as failure of capabilities to perform certain functions necessary for human welfare. The concept of capability represents a significant shift in Sen's thinking on poverty and food insecurity of direct and indirect entitlement failures (Sen 1981). While the concept of entitlement represents human needs in material terms including cash income, the concept of capability is much broader and includes socioeconomic, political, and cultural needs. According to Sen, the overall capability of an individual constitutes a combination of requisites that includes simple requirements like food and nourishment as well as complex and intricate social and political requirements such as achievement of self-respect and ability to participate in civic and social life (Sen A.K, 1991). Sen identifies capabilities as both instrumental and intrinsic (e.g., income, education, health, human rights, civil rights, cultural rights, etc) to allow people functioning (to do the things they want to do) and being (to exist in a state they want to experience) (Hulme David et al, 2001:9). Individuals experience deprivation when they lack capabilities and fail in functioning.

Sen's idea of capabilities leads to a much broader definition of poverty. Capability expansion means enhancing and broadening opportunities and freedom of choice to acquire requisites. In a sense, capability expansion involves a materially and spiritually gratifying life. Poverty, then, could conceptually be seen as capability failure. According to Sen, "the basic failure that poverty implies is one of having minimally adequate capabilities" (Sen, 1992:111); accordingly, "poverty is better seen in terms of capability failure than in terms of the failure to meet the 'basic needs' of specified commodities" (Sen, 1992:109). In line with this argument, Sen calls for re-orientation of poverty analysis from stipulations of low incomes to terms of insufficient basic capabilities. He maintains that, "the re-orientation from an income-centered to capability-centered view gives us a better understanding of what is involved in the challenge of poverty" (Sen: 1992:151).

Sen's capability approach to poverty has had a tremendous influence on academics, international development institutions, and recommendations for policy making. His work has influenced a departure from poverty definitions and measurement, to mapping out general frames for pinpointing causes of poverty. Sen "makes a strong argument that there are compelling reasons to define poverty in terms of lack of basic capabilities to avoid hunger, malnutrition and poor health, and to be adequately clothed, to partake in the life of the community, to feel safe and secure and so forth" (Sahn David E, 2001: 48). The conception of poverty as capability failure attracted academics focusing on poverty in the US, where the quantitative measures of cash income, expenditure on consumption, and calorie intake are the dominant instrumental conceptual policy frameworks for targeting the poor with safety nets. Some academics in the US are currently advocating the capability approach and arguing for the substitution of income generated by people's own efforts for social welfare benefits and other public income transfers as means of combating poverty, to enhancing people's self-reliance and independence. The emphasis on individual responsibility "...implicitly rejects the basic income concept on which official poverty measure [in the US] rests" (Haveman R and Mullikin M, Undated: 11). Thus, the adoption of capability enhancement in the US and other Western countries, instead of social safety nets systems, is seen to be more consistent with Western

culture and ideology. Capability enhancement emphasizes “the merits of individual independence (relative to reliance on government programs), the negative effects of government programs on individual behavior, and the desirability of a smaller social policy role of government”<sup>4</sup> (Haveman R and Mullikin M, Undated: 11). However, there is an implicit recognition of the need for social safety nets; but only for a small section of the poor population that could include the fragile elderly, disabled people, and children. In understanding poverty and underdevelopment, the conception of poverty as capability failure could be seen more relevant to countries of the South than the US and other industrial countries of the North.

Given the multi-dimensional character of poverty, and the fact that combinations of requisites necessary for greater opportunities and freedom of choice differ between individuals as well as between societies, capability failure at the empirical level allows for a differentiated approach that could deal with poverty and its causes. This could reveal the diverse and heterogeneous forms of poverty and causes at individual, local, as well as regional levels. Differentiated conception of poverty based on capability failure helps in the formulation and prediction of economic policy and differentiated poverty implications for different social groups, regions, and localities; thus, the reformulation of a better-suited anti-poverty and pro-poor policy. The poor own definition of poverty, in relation to their own objective and different circumstances, could be incorporated not only in the definition of poverty but also in the formulation of different and more realistic and relevant sustainable anti-poverty projects and programs.

To illustrate this point in my own fieldwork in three areas (Khartoum, Kordofan, and Gezira) in rural and urban Sudan, different factors are emphasized as major contributors to poverty. In rural Kordofan, the drop in subsistence and cash crop production as a result of drought and pest attacks plus the lack or scarcity of clean drinking water are main factors leading to the deterioration of living conditions. In Gezira, where the State maintains control over irrigation and production, a main factor is the inability to decide on cropping and selection of market-demanded crops. In addition, the unavailability of irrigation water and poor roads to transport crops to nearby markets are major factors contributing to poverty and deteriorated living conditions of poor peasant farmers who are allowed to cultivate crops on smaller plots of land with little State intervention. Lack of credit, lack of access to production inputs, and low producer prices are among the factors identified by farmers in rural Khartoum as the main constraints that perpetuate their poverty conditions.

While other requisites are still important, expanding access to opportunities and freedom of choice follows each of the three different priorities in each case. In the case of Gezira, access to land and freedom of action to decide on what to produce, means independence, freedom from State excessive surplus extractions, anticipated access to higher returns, better access to food, better health, greater participation in community and social life, and other opportunities that enhance well being. For the poor of Kordofan, besides meeting necessary survival requirements, availability of clean and safe water means improving health, avoiding fatal diseases, spending money on food and other requirements rather than on costly water, and saving time spent on fetching water from distant sources. Time saved could be spent in production, increased food, more income, and improving living conditions of poorest and most vulnerable women and children<sup>5</sup>. In rural Khartoum, access to credit and production inputs means increased productivity and higher producer prices; access to better marketing opportunities means improved income and improved living conditions.

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<sup>4</sup> Social policy as the researcher understands in this context is active government role in supporting the poor through safety net programs.

<sup>5</sup> In the dry Sahel zone and some other regions of Africa; including Kordofan, water is a scarce resource and often a source of misery for the majority of the rural population. As it is a necessity for livelihood, available contaminated water is often a cause of water-borne diseases, consumes a large part of cash incomes, time and effort the burden of which is often shouldered by women and children who have to travel long distances to water yards to fetch water.

However, in the three cases numerous and high government taxes and levies and lack or poor educational and health services are common constraints to improved living conditions for all poor peasant farmers in rural Khartoum, Kordofan, and Gezira. Thus, while national policy action is needed to reduce taxes and levies and improve health and educational services, differentiated action for the rural areas in the three regions is required. In Kordofan the provision of clean water, drought resistant crop varieties, and effective pest control are needed. In Gezira, improvement of water delivery, lifting state control, improvement of transport, and provision of marketing opportunities are required. In rural Khartoum, provision of credit, agricultural inputs, and improvement of marketing channels are wanted.

#### **4. The Poor, Poverty Conceptions, and Poverty Reduction**

It has been increasingly widely held that for a host of reasons, the poor own perceptions, views, and knowledge have to be taken seriously and incorporated into poverty research. This applies to the definition of poverty and how to effect poverty reduction. Justification for taking the definition of poverty from the poor themselves is best put by Ruggles (1990). She states:

“After all, poverty is a socially determined state; and in the end, official threshold comes down to what some collection of politicians and program administrators consider adequate level of resources to support life in a particular community. It seems, in many ways, appropriate to ask members of the community directly what they consider a minimally adequate income level” (Ruggles Patricia, 1990:221-22 Quoted in Haveman R and Mullikin M, Undated: 15).

The poor own views differ widely from one country to another; and within a country, from one location to the next. For some it is the lack of employment, for others the insufficiency of cash income to meet basic needs, and for many others the lack of income generating activities and inability to have access to land. The poor definitions of poverty relate to direct experiences and major sources of concern for maintaining survival. Despite diversity, material wellbeing emerges as an important factor. A general pattern could be about concern over livelihood, the nature of which differs from one area to the next. Access to land and credit, extension services, problems of transporting produce to markets, availability and cost of inputs, high taxes, low cash returns for agricultural produce, and availability of off-farm cash earning opportunities are common problems that the rural poor face (Narayan Deepa et al, 2000: 46-53).

Employment opportunities, stability of cash income, consumer commodity prices, and the diversification of cash income sources are major concerns for the urban poor. Lack of opportunity to work and earn cash income because of low skills, color, caste, or ethnicity are major source of inability to earn a living. Because of their poverty and inability to meet collateral for borrowing, the poor cannot have access to formal credit to start small businesses or meet urgent cash needs (Narayan Deepa et al, 2000:53-59). Sharp increases in prices, leading to drop in real incomes, erode urban wages and cash income of urban dwellers, and pushes them into more severe poverty. Both rural and urban poor assert suffering from lack, high cost, or poor quality of educational and health facilities. Despite attempts to diversify sources of cash income, both rural and urban poor lack the opportunities to make the most of their labor and the abundant resources they have.

In defining characteristics of poverty, the poor themselves tend to emphasize factors easy to understand and close to their everyday lives. The following factors stand out as most frequent responses: not enough to eat, low income, no land for agriculture, indebtedness, illness, poor general health, and disability (Somchai Jitsuchon, 2001).

Despite the difficulties associated with it, the participatory approach considers the views of the poor and gives valuable insights into local conditions. Detailed knowledge of local conditions

is necessary for the design of effective location-specific poverty reduction strategies. Getting information through the participatory approach, at the lower local level where the views of the poor are considered, reveals the specificity of the local conditions relevant to poverty reduction strategies that are designed to address some specific local aspects of poverty. Expanding the views of the poor to include coping mechanisms, constraints faced, and the solutions they perceive to their poverty conditions could be very helpful in the design of comprehensive poverty reduction strategies at local, national, and international levels. However, causes of poverty still need to be sought in areas extending beyond the specific local context of the poor. Thus, while the participatory approach is of great help in addressing certain local aspects of poverty at micro lower levels, it could not reveal causes of poverty at macro levels.

#### **4. Causes of Poverty and Poverty Reduction Policy Recommendations:**

In the cloudy debate over the definition and measurement of poverty, it is difficult to get some comprehensive understanding of the causes of poverty. Comprehension of the underlying causes of poverty and not simply its manifestations and assessment of its magnitude and depth, forms the primary appropriate foundation for basing and pursuing effective anti-poverty policy and actions. Causes of poverty are as complex as its definition and the selection of measurement criteria. Poverty causes could be sought at different international, national, regional, local community, family, and individual levels. The matrix and combination of implicated forces and mechanisms could also differ according to socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historical conditions. Subsequently, the way these factors and forces interact and combine at different levels to result in particular forms of poverty, differs in different countries, regions, communities, and ethnic groups. While the investigation of causes of poverty at all levels and the way they combine, intersect, and interact could be the bedrock on which anti-poverty action is grounded, the definition of poverty itself (what is to be combated) is equally significant.

Whether taken at the local, national, or international level, a particular definition of what constitutes poverty offers a set of policy actions, which differ with the adoption of different definitions, based on implicit or explicit assumptions of poverty causes. The material and biological minimum need conceptions of poverty, measured in absolute money metric terms, are implicitly related to development concepts perceived as economic development and growth. Subsequently, in developing countries, the main factors behind poverty are understood as the impediments to economic growth; and policy readjustment for an increased rate of economic growth is thought to simultaneously lead to poverty reduction. In developed countries or countries that have achieved or maintained rapid economic growth, poverty is seen as a result of leaving out some sections of the population during the process. In this sense, poverty is considered a residual or byproduct of economic growth and economic development. Safety nets and social support mechanisms, for instance, in the form of supplementary benefits, unemployment benefits, and food support are adopted as tools for poverty reduction.

In this context the measurement of poverty using the absolute minimum cash income, expenditure on consumption, and calorie is, in very general terms, adopted to approximate the number of the poor in order to facilitate targeting poverty reduction. With this economic approach to the definition and diagnosis of the multidimensional poverty problem, the cures recommended are the acceleration of economic growth and the adoption of social support system to seek out dropouts. Hence, social, political, and cultural dimensions are rarely incorporated in defining poverty, analyzing its causes, and recommending policy measures for poverty reduction.

The quantitative conception of poverty concentrates on economic and material factors and equates economic wellbeing (increase in cash income) with welfare and improvement in

other aspects. This theory is intimately connected to the conception of economic growth as synonymous to development. *The definition of poverty and the associated problems of poverty measurement* have, subsequently, attracted more attention of scholars, researchers, and concerned agencies *than the root causes of poverty*. Effective poverty reduction actions generated need for knowledge about the incidence, depth, and magnitude of poverty while targeting focused attention on defining and measuring poverty to distinguish the poor and determine the size and magnitude of their poverty. Thus, while poverty and its measurement as a symptom of social, economic, and political malaise has been at the center of research on poverty, the root causes of the malaise itself have not received warranted attention. In the words of one scholar:

“The approaches to explaining poverty that have so far been produced by the social scientists are only incomplete. They do not provide any total explanation of poverty as a result of processes of social development; but concentrate on single aspects that contribute to poverty. In this respect, compared with other areas of development studies, poverty research itself is in a state of absolute and relative poverty” (Hemmer Hans Rimbert, 1994:56).

A resolution to the problem of definition and measurement of what poverty means in terms of correspondence between abstract concept and reality is significant for the formulation of effective poverty reduction policies, actions, data-gathering, and analyses methodologies. Clarifications of the definition, measurement indicators, and the conceptual frame for analyses of empirical data largely determine what poverty is. Nonetheless, identifying root causes of poverty for effective poverty reduction actions is as and even more important than issues of definition and measurement. Von Hauff M (1994:43-44) highlights the importance of the definition of poverty as well as the identification of its causes for framing coherent poverty reduction strategies:

“A prerequisite for a consistent combating of poverty is a conceptual and empirical foundation, which has so far only been partially supplied. The question of how a consistent poverty-oriented policy should be formulated is ultimately dependent upon which concept of poverty is considered and which causes of poverty can be identified and analyzed... The problem of poverty must therefore be considered from various angles, in the context of which the structural causes of poverty can be identified and effective measures to combat poverty can be derived” (Von Hauff M and Kruse B, 1994:43-44).

The most significant issues linked to the causes of poverty and tackled more in the literature are those of economic growth, inequality, and income distribution. The failure to achieve or the success in the achievement of poverty reduction is linked to economic growth. Economic growth is seen as necessary for poverty reduction and there seems to be no breaking of the consensus, amongst scholars of all persuasions, that economic growth is a precondition for poverty reduction. But the issues of whether economic growth alone is sufficient for poverty reduction and whether an increased rate of economic growth, alone, automatically leads to poverty reduction remain controversial. Similarly, and associated with economic growth and poverty issues, are the questions of whether inequality necessarily accompanies economic growth, inequalities at which stages of economic growth, and whether reduction of inequalities contributes to poverty reduction and economic growth have also remained a subject of a heated debate. One need not go into the details of these debates here. What is presented below are some selected conceptual insights that shed light on increasingly narrowing gaps in the theoretical stands, with the broadening of the definition of poverty and a growing attention to the determinants and causes of poverty. The focus for combating poverty will be on economic growth, reduction of inequalities, and macro policy readjustment.

Early during the previous decade the World Bank (1990) drew a distinction between poverty and inequality. “Whereas poverty is concerned with the absolute standard of living of a part of society -the poor- inequality refers to relative living standards across the whole society” (World Bank, 1990:26). This was in line with the strongly held definition of poverty in absolute terms “as the inability to attain minimal standard of living” (World Bank, 1990:26). But it has increasingly been realized that the minimal standard of living means more than just meeting the biological needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Social, political, and cultural needs, defined within a specific social and cultural context, are also regarded as important requirements for well being.

As the multidimensional character of poverty has increasingly been recognized, better knowledge of related social and political aspects has become as important as cash income in effectively combating poverty. Infant mortality rates, primary school enrollment, nutritional status, real wages, and real agricultural producer prices are some of the indicators that have increasingly been used in the measurement of poverty and how it is affected by government policy (Barber B Conable, 1992:70). According to a senior World Bank official, lifting the burden of poverty off hundreds of millions means,

“New freedom for them - freedom from hunger, from ignorance, from avoidable ill health; freedom to determine their own destinies; freedom to participate in growth and improvement - in short freedom for a future brighter than the past” (Barber B Conable, 1992:70).

Unlike what has been dominant thinking around a decade ago, and as the conception of poverty has broadened, the causes of poverty and ultimately the necessary action to combat it have been sought in the socioeconomic and political structures and processes of society:

“Poverty is not a personal phenomenon; it is a social status. As such, its effects can be measured at the level of the individual; (But) its causes must be sought elsewhere in a number of closely interlinked socioeconomic processes. And from the point of poverty alleviation, the processes of becoming are just as important as the state of being” (IFAD, 1993:9).

Likewise, poverty eradication has progressively been sought in measures extending beyond economic policy reform to increase economic growth. Income distribution has been seen as a determinant of poverty and an important factor to consider for poverty reduction. Quoting a senior World Bank official, Aziz (Aziz Sartaj, Undated: 4-5) stated, “a growth rate which is equal or just above the rate of population growth will generally worsen poverty.” In a similar fashion,

“A growth rate, which is twice as large as the rate of population growth, will bring about a perceptible reduction in the level of poverty in countries in which income distribution is not so skewed. In countries in which income distribution is highly skewed, as in Brazil for example, GDP growth at a pace three times greater than the population increase will be required to make a significant dent in poverty” (*Aziz Sartaj: Undated: 5-6*).

The links and interconnection between the level of inequality, growth, and poverty have been progressively acknowledged. There is almost unanimity that economic growth is necessary for poverty reduction. However, the extent to which economic growth could contribute to poverty reduction depends on socioeconomic inequalities and stable state institutions. Stable state institutions and decrease in inequalities, in turn, contribute to sustained economic growth:

“While economic growth is systematically associated with poverty reduction, the rate at which growth translates into lower poverty depends on the initial level of inequality in the distribution of income and how that distribution changes over time.

Growth—and its effectiveness in reducing poverty—also depends on sound, stable governance. So, confronting socioeconomic inequalities and building sound institutions can be both important for providing a socially sustainable basis for overall growth and for ensuring that poor people gain substantially from that growth” (*World Bank, 2001:35*)

In the debate over the relationship between economic growth, poverty, and inequality, a strong trend in the literature on poverty has emerged that advocates redistribution and reduced inequalities arguing that such policies not only in line with economic growth, but also more importantly enhance economic growth. “The belief in the trade-off between equity and growth in both developed and developing economies is widely held. Recent evidence, however, indicates that the two are compatible and that they are mutually reinforcing” (Griffin, 2001:2).

Taking the example of land redistribution and the expansion of primary and secondary education and their positive impact on growth, Griffin K and Ickowitz A (1997) emphasize the mutually enhancing relationship between equality of distribution of economic resources, economic growth, and poverty reduction. While it is strongly advocated that a more equitable distribution of economic resources contributes to economic growth, it is also argued that, “an egalitarian pattern of economic growth contributes more to human development than an autocratic pattern” (Griffin K, 1997:4, Quoted in Griffin K, and Ickowitz, 1997:6).

On the lengthy debate of whether inequalities are compatible or incompatible with economic growth and poverty reduction, Sobhan (2001) sees that, “the tired debate over the prioritization of growth as the route to poverty eradication should be put to rest.” Rather than viewing economic growth as leading to poverty reduction, he postulates that enhancing the capacity of the poor as producers, consumers, and owners of wealth is “the most effective instrument of sustained economic growth.”

Sobhan (2001, in general terms, attributes the root causes of poverty to the poor lacking command over economic, social, and political resources, as well as the character of the social system that preserves these structures. He calls for the reversal of macro-policy reformulation as basis for poverty alleviation:

“[The] eradication of poverty should remain central to the design of macro-policy reform rather than an aftermath... The need for a macro-policy designed to eliminate poverty is premised on the argument that poverty originates in the structural features of society, which can only be addressed at the macro-level. Policy interventions, designed to redesign structural sources of poverty, brings into consideration issues of social, political, and economic reform” (*Sobhan, 2001:3*).

Along similar reasoning, Norman Uphoff implicitly attributes the economic success of the East Asian ‘Tigers’ (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore) in achieving rapid economic growth to their governments’ poverty reduction policies. The capacity building of their populations through land reform, universal basic education, housing, and primary health care policies have all made marked contributions to human development. While these policies have significantly contributed to poverty eradication, they simultaneously contributed to economic growth (Uphoff: Norman, Undated: 5).

Research on poverty has witnessed a general but gradual shift in recent years from emphasis on definitions to exploring causes of poverty. This has not only been exemplified by high concern over the relationship between growth, inequality, and poverty, but also by the importance allotted to many other structural socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors that hamper the poor from leading their way out of poverty.

“National economic development is central to poverty reduction; but poverty is an outcome of more than economic processes. It is an outcome of economic, social, and

political processes that interact with and reinforce each other in ways that can worsen or ease the deprivation poor people face every day. To attack poverty requires promoting opportunities, facilitating empowerment, and enhancing security with actions at the local, national, and global levels” (WB, 2001:37).

Structural causes of both rural and urban poverty are numerous and differ according to the specific social, economic, political, geographic, and demographic conditions that prevail in different countries. These factors function at the local, national, and international levels, and interrelate and interact in complex ways to result in poverty. However, some general patterns of lack of access to productive assets, markets, human development, and good governance have been singled out as major structural causes behind dire rural poverty conditions in less developed countries (Narayan Deepa et al, 2000, WB, 2001, Sobhan, 2001). Access to productive resources, though a necessary enabling condition, is not enough; and a pro-poor policy that provides transport infrastructure to information is equally important to enable the poor to sell at favorable prices. Pro-poor policies, which entail addressing structural causes of rural poverty, include eliminating market distortions affecting products of the poor, reducing heavy taxation, improving real agricultural prices, and providing easy access to credit both for consumption and for production.

Human development is closely interconnected to good governance. Expenditure on and efficiency of health and educational services for the poor to have access to good quality and less costly health and educational services are main factors that contribute to human development and human wellbeing. Human development is an objective in its own right. It is a means to improve main resource of the poor so that they earn income and contribute to economic growth and economic development. In other words, and using Sen’s capability terminology, health and education are both ‘intrinsic’ and ‘instrumental’ capabilities.

However, without the empowerment of the poor within the political system, significant improvement in access to assets, human development, security, and influence could not be visualized. The marginalization of the poor, within the power structure in society, is one of the root causes of poverty. The creation of an institutional framework, within which the poor could be organized to make their voice heard and to influence state policies and actions both at the community and national levels, is a necessary prerequisite for poverty eradication. Subsequently, the restructuring of *macro policies* to serve the interest of the poor requires a shift in political power balance and reversal of the power position of the poor. This could lead to a reduction in inequalities, providing the poor with access to productive assets, and restructuring public expenditure to afford infrastructure, access to health, education, and employment. Such policies would not only empower the poor and significantly contribute to poverty reduction, but also stimulate rapid economic growth and promote human development.

With recent increased attention to the interconnection and interaction of a multiplicity of economic, social, and political factors and forces at the local community, regional, national, and international levels in causing and sustaining poverty, the quest for an explanatory theory on poverty has grown. Despite heightened concern over causes of poverty, an integrated, comprehensive, and conceptual framework that explains the processes and mechanisms producing and reproducing poverty remains lacking. According to Oyen:

“Theoretical knowledge about poverty processes is limited. Although everybody has his or her own theory about the causes of poverty, the scientific foundation of understanding poverty is still weak...At present, it might be said that we know almost enough about the poor ...[But we] know less about the processes leading to poverty and sustaining it” (Else Oyen, 2002:2-3).

Oyen points out that the lack of attention, in poverty reduction and poverty alleviation efforts, goes back to understanding the common causes of poverty and the way they interact (Oyen,

2002:5). Oyen puts forward what he calls ‘poverty producing agents or forces’ and numerates many socioeconomic and political factors and forces at all levels as causes of poverty. His emphasis is on the political factor and conflict of interests, which, according to Oyen, might lead to intentional and unintentional creation of poverty. The political factor is important, particularly the role of the State in pursuing policies that simultaneously provide opportunities for the poor and creates an enabling environment to stimulate economic growth and development.

## **5. Poverty Research and Poverty Assessments: Issues of Methodology**

### ***Quantitative Pro***

As the interrelated issues of definition, measurement, and causes of poverty have been subjects of lengthy debates, selecting methods of data collection have also been debatable. Differences aside, the choice of methodology of data collection is closely related to the conception of poverty held, and to the criteria (indicators) for its detection and measurement. Various methods of data collection and analysis have evolved within the two broad approaches: quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection. However, using either of the two approaches depends on the conception of poverty undertaken.

The material conception of poverty approach has developed indicators for the identification and measurement of poverty in terms of cash income, expenditure, consumption, and calorie intake. It is widely held that material approaches “... permit precise measurement and comparisons over time and between regions” (David Hume David et al, 2001:6). In the measurement of poverty, the money metric approach uses household surveys and census data as methods of data collection. It pursues standard scientific and statistical procedures to make national inferences and generalizations arriving at approximations of the incidence level, the depth, and the degree of severity of poverty in society. Despite the subjectivity involved in deciding on the basic minimum of these material needs, the process and the generated quantitative data are objective once the criteria and indicators for measurement are set.

Based on the collected data, the degree and magnitude of poverty and the categorization of the poor into groups relevant to the severity and depth of poverty, could be established according to the set criteria of poverty measurement. Thus, the method generates aggregate information that could be obtained on the incidence of poverty as well as on the different categories of the poor grouped according to the different degrees of poverty. The quantitative method could also yield time series, indicate trends, and assign figures to trends; thus, it is more attractive to policy makers (Chambers Robert, 2001:22).

However, despite criticism that the money metric approach is subjective at the core with regard to the basis on which objective data is collected; all social sciences are subjective in varying degrees in a way or another. It is not unreasonable to judge the money metric quantitative methodology approach as objective. Once the conception is clearly defined, the measurement criteria set, and the methodology of data collection to approximate the concept in terms of correspondence between abstract and reality clearly described, the process becomes scientific and objective. The objectivity of the quantitative approach to poverty analysis is not only exemplified by the scientific steps it pursues, but also further enhanced by detachment from value judgment in the different proceeding stages of data collection and data analysis.

The quantitative method has also been criticized for missing out a lot on the attributes of poverty and for neglecting the non-material requisites of human welfare. Critics argue that taking cash income as the sole criteria for measuring poverty does not capture aspects of human wellbeing and ill being.

“We should recognize the impossibility of gauging economic wellbeing (or standard of living) by a single variable. Various indicators have been used; incomes, consumption, access to basic human needs, life expectancy, literacy, and so on - all have their place” (*Gary S Fields, 1999:2*).

Wellbeing in the money metric approaches is explained in terms of meeting material needs. Ill-being is perceived as the inability to meet minimum material needs the value of which could be set and quantified in money terms. Martin Ravallion mapped out the problems of standard poverty measurement techniques in the quantitative tradition:

“The first such problem is the *identification problem* of how to weigh aspects of individual welfare not revealed by market behavior...The second problem is the referencing problem of determining the reference of welfare above which one is deemed to be poor - the poverty line in welfare space, which must anchor the money-metric poverty line.... Addressing the identification and referencing problems requires information that is not found in conventional objective socioeconomic survey data for representative samples of households. Sample surveys restricted to the standard ‘objective’ data have been found to be of limited use for measurement and policy” (*Martin Ravallion, 2001:39*).

Grasp of the causes of poverty at all levels is a necessary prerequisite for policy recommendations. Effective anti-poverty action has to be firmly grounded on adequate understanding of the multidimensional character of poverty. The quantitative approaches to poverty, which emphasize measuring poverty in money metric terms, offer little in terms of policy recommendations. Bourguignon Francois, a scholar belonging to the quantitative tradition casts doubt over whether reliance on one-sided econometric approaches alone could uncover poverty causes (Bourguignon Francois, 2001:44-46). Nevertheless, the scholar holds the reservation that too much detail of actual living conditions of the poor and their community, which the qualitative approach advocates, may hide the logic of poverty trap mechanisms by introducing some confusion between causes and effects” (Bourguignon Francois, 2001:45). However, with the evolution of the conception of poverty as a multidimensional concept and the expansion of research, the qualitative approach to information gathering has increasingly gained significance and has widely been used in poverty research.

### ***The Qualitative Approaches to Poverty***

As the definition of poverty and its attributes broadened, and its multidimensional character appreciated, areas of poverty research in terms of definition, measurement, and causes also expanded. The qualitative approach or the contextual method of data collection is associated with the capability and poor participation approaches to poverty definition and analysis that partly evolved out of the criticism leveled against the money metric approaches and the associated quantitative method.

“When we move to measuring poverty in terms of capabilities, we begin to bridge the quantitative and qualitative methods divide, and simultaneously address some of the weaknesses of the quantitative methods.... Measurements of functionings or capabilities are generally associated with individuals, not households. Thus, with these measures, we begin to gain insight into intra-household issues that are often neglected with (*sic*) traditional quantitative poverty assessments” (*Sahn David E, 2001:48*).

Consequently, instead of just considering income consumption or expenditure, recommendations on measures to reduce poverty are becoming broader and more inclusive. One of the major advantages of the qualitative approach to poverty research is its inclusiveness and coverage of the different dimensions of poverty. Moreover, the use of semi-structured and unstructured interviews reveals information and opens up areas of knowledge

about poverty that would not have been revealed by formal survey questionnaires. Open-ended questions “underscored issues the importance of which...had not previously [been] appreciated.” Poverty appraisals [open-ended questions] made it possible “to explore matters tough to frame precisely through traditional survey instruments” (Barrett Chris, 2001:57).

The qualitative approaches deal with causes, mechanisms, and processes of poverty. The detection and understanding of causes, processes, and mechanisms generating and regenerating poverty are required for the formulation of effective anti-poverty policy:

“For the qualitative analysis of poverty it is much less a matter of descriptions and analysis than ascertaining and analyzing processes and mechanisms which cause and reproduce poverty. This [is] the focal point of qualitative research on poverty, which should ultimately provide the necessary basis for the planning and formulation of a consistent poverty reduction policy” (*Von Hauff M and Kruse B, 1994:54*).

Unlike all other approaches, the qualitative approach incorporates the experience and knowledge of the poor and gives them a chance to contribute to formulating anti-poverty policy actions these actions. This could have two positive implications: i) empowering the poor by giving them a venue of influence on anti-poverty policy; ii) increasing the potential effectiveness of anti-poverty actions by basing it on information and analyses more relevant to local conditions. However, the use of the qualitative approach would be more useful in designing projects and programs implemented at the local level, where effectiveness is sensitive to thorough knowledge of local conditions rather than macro policy issues.

With all the advantages the qualitative method has over the quantitative method, it has many difficulties and shortcomings. The lack of clear criteria and a broad conceptual framework allows information to unfold in the field and permits surprises which might counter commonly held perceptions. While this could be an advantage for generating new knowledge, it renders the approach more susceptible to value judgment and subjectivity of both researcher and the researched. This would in turn influence the quality of data, analyses, conclusions, and subsequently policy recommendations. Although this is not much different from the quantitative approach, it could justifiably be stated that susceptibility to subjectivity is greater in using the qualitative approach, as value judgement may affect the collected data and the proceeding stages of data categorization, interpretation, and analyses. The susceptibility of the quantitative approach to value judgement could be limited only in the initial stages of definition and the selection of criteria for the detection and measurement of poverty; i.e., the researcher is less prone to subjectivity in subsequent stages of data categorization and analysis.

The main problem that the qualitative method faces is that of measurement and quantification. While income, expenditure, and consumption could be quantified and precisely measured, qualitative poverty attributes such as capabilities, freedom of choice, and vulnerability could not be easily measured and quantified. In addition, the more dimensions are incorporated into the definition of poverty, the more difficult and complicated is the measurement problem (Von Hauff and Kruse, 1994:45). The UNDP’s human development index, developed on the basis of Sen’s ideas to measure capability attainment or failure, takes only national aggregates and not households or individuals. Indicators to measure individual capabilities have yet to be developed. But, if dealing with the specificity of the local conditions and revealing much about these conditions is one of the most significant advantages of the qualitative approach, then the usefulness or the necessity of developing measurable qualitative indicators to apply to all conditions becomes doubtful. However, general patterns or regularities across different local conditions that could be ascertained if the quantitative approach is adopted could also emerge by using the qualitative approach for one and the same population.

With reference to another version of the quantitative approach to poverty exemplified by the Voices of the Poor Study, Norman Uphoff points out some of the potential shortcomings of the qualitative method. These include: i) whether those interviewed are a good representation; ii) how can different aspects of the poor be summarized; iii) whether an idea of severity and magnitude of personal poverty could be formed; iv) how trends could be identified; v) whether the number of the poor is increasing or declining; and, vi) whether poverty is getting deeper (Uphoff Norman, 2001:34).

Nonetheless, it has now widely been recognized that the qualitative approaches, which appropriately deal with the multidimensional character of poverty, offer useful insights into a full range of deprivations that constitute poverty and give the poor a voice in an important issue that primarily concerns them. However, the major drawback of the qualitative methods remains, “lack [of] the precision and comparability of income consumption measures” (Hulme David et al, 2001:6).

Moreover, the choice of a particular research method or a combination of research methods could not be made at random. It is the nature of the topic and the relevant information required in a particular investigation that set the parameters for the decision to choose among different or a combination of research methods. “The choice between different research methods should depend upon what one is trying to find out” (David Silverman, 2001:25). Partly then the choice of the research method or a set of methods in a particular poverty investigation relates to the definition of poverty adopted, the assumed causes on which the research focuses, and the level at which poverty is investigated. If, for instance, minimum cash income is used to determine the incidence and the depth of poverty in a particular society, the quantitative method has to be applied. While if poverty is defined in terms of capability failure, a combination of both the quantitative and the qualitative methods needs to be utilized to approximate poverty in terms of failure of capabilities whether quantifiable such as income, or non-quantifiable such as vulnerability. Indicators to approximate qualitative capabilities could also be developed and incorporated in surveys for vulnerability. Indicators such as disability, region of residence, gender, class, caste, having a permanent or a casual job, the frequency of falling ill, the seasonality of income, fluctuation of cash income, and social support networks of relatives and friends could be incorporated into surveys depending on the local conditions.

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

The literature on the definition of poverty and the indicators to measure poverty and its causes have evolved over time corresponding to the increasing attention on the problem and relevant socioeconomic and political changes and developments. The quantitative approaches dominated thinking on policy action in the 1960s and throughout the 1970 and 1980s; and the focus had been on lack of minimum cash income to maintain a minimal acceptable standard of living. Money metric criteria were used as the sole poverty measure to determine the poverty line in order to differentiate the poor from the non-poor. The capability approach, which emphasizes the multidimensional character of poverty, has become widely accepted since the 1990s. Poverty in this conception is understood in terms of failure of capabilities, and includes, in addition to cash income, qualitative attributes such as education, skills, health, security, and freedom. Thus, poverty as a concept could have multiple attributes, some of which are material in nature that could be measured and quantified (cash income, consumption, calorie intake), and others that are non-material (capabilities, vulnerability and freedom), which are difficult to measure and quantify.

The quantitative conception of poverty, which solely concentrates on economic and material factors and equates cash income with well being, is intimately connected with the conception of economic growth as synonymous with development. In this conception poverty is seen

mainly as outcome of lack or slow rate of economic growth. Since economic growth is conceived to lead to poverty reduction, the causes of poverty are subsequently implicitly regarded as economic impediments or constraints to economic growth. Policy recommendations for poverty reduction are thus basically centered on removing obstacles to an accelerated rate of economic growth. An increase in the rate of economic growth of a country, whose poverty incidence is high, is perceived to result in raising cash income above the absolute minimum for a large section of the poor; thus, reducing poverty. Another policy recommendation that follow from the quantitative approach is the adoption of safety nets to support the poor regarded as residual or a byproduct of increased economic growth. Implicit in this is that in the process of economic growth a group or a section of poor population might be created or remain unaffected by economic growth. Since safety nets are seen as the appropriate instruments to deal with the poor, the magnitude of poverty and the percentage of poor in society have become important for effective targeting of anti-poverty action.

The literature on poverty reveals that poverty could be investigated at the individual, household, community, spatial (regional, local, urban, rural), national, and international levels. It could be investigated as a transitory (temporary result of short-term shocks) or chronic (resulting from a secular long term trends). The investigation could look into the degree, extent, and severity of poverty to identify the ultra poor (the poorest of the poor). There is an emerging consensus that poverty has many dimensions, material, as well as non-material. The multiple dimensions or attributes could be present within one and the same unit of analysis (an individual, a household, a community, a region, or a country). A combination of attributes could be considered as poverty. The severity of poverty could partly be measured by the degree to which multiple dimensions are present. Sets of combinations of attributes of what represents poverty as an abstract concept differ according to theoretical frameworks; and in reality, differ according to different complex socioeconomic and political circumstances relevant to a given definition of poverty.

The concept of poverty is characterized by fluidity. With differences in socioeconomic and political contexts, it has different meanings and connotations at the conceptual and reality levels. Subsequently, the development of measurement indicators for its existence and the degree to which it is prevalent in a society could not be fixed and universally applied. There is relativity of measurement indicators between different conceptions of poverty as well as within each conception. Relativity over time and space makes the issue of measurement even more complicated. Indicators to measure poverty devised on the basis of one conception vary over time. If, for example, the minimum standard of living varies over time, cash income accordingly varies as a result of changes in the set minimal standard of living as well as changes in prices and income levels over space.

The literature on poverty reveals that poverty is a multidimensional socioeconomic phenomenon and could be defined and given different attributes by different scholars, governments, and the poor. These definitions vary from the extreme quantitative definitions of cash income, consumption, and calorie intake to the broader qualitative definitions of capabilities, deprivation, livelihood failures, and security. Differences in the definition of poverty reflect differences in disciplinary perspectives, value judgment of scholars and researchers, political interests of governments, and specific physical, socio-cultural, and political constraints of the poor. Differences in defining poverty result in differences in the choice of indicators and measurement criteria for the detection of poverty, policy, and implicit or explicit causes. Accordingly, adopting a definition has implications on what is to be measured and how, implicit or explicit assumption of causes, what appropriate actions to be pursued, and outcome of poverty impact assessments. While indicators of poverty in quantitative attributes of cash income, expenditure, consumption, and calorie intake, could be measured and quantified; measurement indicators for poverty in terms of capabilities,

opportunities, empowerment, and livelihoods are not clear and still need to be refined. Although some policy recommendations, based on the qualitative approach, could be outlined at the national level, they are rather diffused and lack the clarity of those based on the quantitative approach. But perhaps this lack of clarity could be an advantage rather than a disadvantage in that different conditions in different countries and regions necessitate the adoption of different anti-poverty policies and actions. Still, some issues, constraints, and limitations could be universal in character but with different specific local manifestations such: as lack of assets locally manifested as landlessness, lack of implements and tools, lack of livestock and finance capital assets.

Traditions and statistical procedures of carrying out household and other surveys that measure income, expenditure, consumption, and calorie intake yield quantifiable numerical data with some adjustment allowing for variances in local conditions. On the other hand wellbeing, ill being, failure of capabilities, livelihoods, opportunities, vulnerability, isolation, and exclusion are only recently recognized and acknowledged in identifying poverty. Because of their qualitative nature, they could not be easily captured and measured. What constitutes well being, for instance, is not measurable like income and expenditure. Data based on quality is more susceptible to value judgement and the specificity of local conditions than what constitutes a minimal level of income or consumption necessary for an acceptable life (therefore, the later is also subject to value judgement).

There are as much disagreements about the causes of poverty as about its definition and measurement in reality. Causes of poverty differ and include individual abilities and disabilities, demographic factors, economic, environmental, cultural, social, and political factors. Poverty is a complex phenomenon, which is difficult to attribute to one factor. Causes of poverty a research could come up with depend on a number of features. Among these are: the adopted conception of poverty, the level at which poverty is examined, the focus of the research, and specific socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the population being researched, disciplinary orientation of the research, and above all the value judgement of the researcher. Combinations of different sets of interpretations are thus a result of this influx of conceptions, differences in socioeconomic and cultural contexts, as well as variations in theoretical and data collection methodologies.

Defined in terms of capability failure and the failure to perform functionings, research on the causes of poverty could extend beyond economic growth to investigate an infinite matrix of causes that hamper individuals and limit their freedom, choices, and opportunities to pursue a materially and spiritually satisfying life. The causes could be investigated at the individual, family, community, national, and international levels. Causes could be a combination of factors (e.g. socioeconomic, political, cultural, demographic, environmental, ethnic, and geographic) that interact to result in poverty. Based on different interpretation of the causes of poverty, different recommendations of how to combat, alleviate, and finally eradicate it are put forward. These also vary from safety nets, reformulation of economic policy and active state social policy to restructuring of power relations at the household, local, national, and international levels to empower the poor and give them a voice.

If the multidimensionality of poverty is taken as a basis, it would be quite reasonable to adopt an approach that captures dimensions of other approaches. All definitions have contributions to offer; not only in terms of conception but also in terms of multiple different policy actions recommended to combat poverty. The multiplicity of poverty attributes (or dimensions) in all its degrees from mere poverty to chronic or ultra poverty calls for the use of a combination of definitions. Consequently each definition, which emphasizes certain dimensions, provides an analysis and an advanced understanding of a set of dimensions and recommends

corresponding policy action. Dropping some attributes of poverty could, in some cases of poverty definitions, be a matter of difference in emphasis rather than substance.

Indicators to approximate capability, livelihoods, security, and vulnerability could not be universal like minimum cash income. One of the main advantages of the qualitative method, perhaps, lies in its success of uncovering the diversity and heterogeneity of forms of economic, social, and political pointers or indicators of capability failure corresponding to diverse and specific local conditions. Taking the multidimensional character of poverty into account, it is difficult to have a universal measurement in any objective sense. A differentiated approach that aims at outlining differentiated and combined anti-poverty policy packages, in which both the qualitative and quantitative approaches are used, seems to be necessary. The quantitative approach could provide indications to the formulation of national and international actions for poverty reduction dealing with cash income and consumption. The qualitative approach could make a contribution of detailing location specific poverty attributes and causes that correspond to the specific socioeconomic and cultural conditions at the community, local, and regional levels that could not be uncovered by quantitative approaches. As such, the qualitative approach's contribution does not only address the multidimensional poverty attributes but also make poverty reduction actions more effective and relevant.

Different definitions of and approaches to poverty research are not necessarily mutually exclusive; and for effective reduction of the multi-attributes of poverty, they need to be regarded as complementing rather than substituting each other. Similarly, the data collection methodologies in the quantitative and qualitative traditions could be seen as mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. The recognition of elements of strength as well as elements of weakness of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches could be the starting point for improving on both and for establishing complementarity between the two. Complementarity could also take the form of developing and incorporating indicators for the collection of qualitative data in surveys and/or alternatively the samples used for the qualitative data could be stretched or enlarged to be more representative of the population under investigation.

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*As of August 1998, financial support towards the ERF Working Papers Series from the Commission of the European Communities (through the FEMISE Program) is gratefully acknowledged. The views expressed in the Working Papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.*



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