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## **Triglav Notes**

### **Seeking an Ethical Framework for Poverty Reduction**

**Report on the  
Gathering of 2-3 May 2003  
Held at the 100 Acres Retreat Center  
New Boston, New Hampshire**

*The Circle thanks Saint Anselm Abbey for the use of the retreat center.*

The Circle is deeply indebted to Agnes Bochmon whose generous contribution to the Circle has helped make this publication possible.

## *Introducing the Triglav Circle*

The Triglav Circle was established in January, 1996, in Cambridge Massachusetts, by eight participants in the United Nations Seminar on Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Social Progress, organized by the United Nations Secretariat, held in Bled, Slovenia, October 1994, in preparation for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development, convened in Copenhagen, March 1995.

Today the Circle is pursuing the following demand and commitment made by governments attending the UN Social Summit and articulated in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development:

*Our societies must respond more effectively to the material and spiritual needs of individuals, their families and the communities in which they lie,*

And,

*We heads of State and Government are committed to a political, economic, ethical and spiritual vision for social development that is based on human dignity, human rights, equality, respect, democracy, mutual responsibility and cooperation, and full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of people.*

In carrying on its work, the Triglav Circle undertakes individual and group projects and hosts gatherings to consider the ideas and values that should underlie sustainable economic and social transformations. The Circle establishes relationships with other individuals and organizations also committed to fostering these core messages of the Social Summit. In May 2001, the Triglav Circle was accepted as a Non Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Since its founding in January 1996, the Triglav Circle has met twice a year to debate a variety of subjects. Meetings among the members and invitees serve as opportunities to stimulate reflection and develop knowledge. . They are also wellsprings from which participants draw renewed interest in the moral dimensions of public affairs and intellectual support for their individual work as it relates, in one way or another, to the quest for humane and responsive societies. The discussions of the meetings are recorded as reflections of the participants and posted on the web site: [www.TriglavCircleOnline.org](http://www.TriglavCircleOnline.org).

### **About The Gathering of 2-3 May 2003**

In continuing its work on the moral and spiritual dimensions of social progress, the Triglav Circle met on the 2nd and-3rd of May at the 100 Acres Retreat Center in New Boston, NH. Fr. John Fortin and the Saint Anselm Benedictine Abbey hosted the gathering.

This Circle, reflecting diverse political orientations, cultures, and occupations, considered how ideas on moral values drawn from the spirit of humanity could enrich the discourse on public policy for achieving poverty reduction in a context of sustainable social progress. .

The rationale for this choice was fourfold:

- The Triglav Circle was created in the aftermath of the World Social Summit, in which governments proclaimed that the "elimination of poverty" was an "ethical imperative." More recently, in the year 2000, the United Nations Millennium Declaration, also adopted by consensus and with the active involvement of the most affluent countries, proclaimed the goal of halving by 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than a dollar a day.
- After the Summit, an even more so after the Millennium Declaration, the international community, led and represented by some international organizations, notably the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank, decided to make the reduction and "elimination of poverty," the most important objective of international cooperation and therefore the center of relations between developed and developing countries. To a large extent, in United Nations circles and in concrete activities undertaken under the umbrella of cooperation for development, the struggle to eradicate poverty has replaced the drive for economic and social development.
- And yet, in recent years, inequalities have increased in all parts of the world and absolute poverty, also called deprivation or misery, has similarly increased in a number of regions, notably Africa and Latin America. In the affluent countries themselves, poverty is on the rise. It seems that despite an unprecedented mobilization of world elites and institutions to "eliminate this scourge," poverty is as obvious and as deeply imbedded in many societies as in earlier periods of history when wealth was less abundant and when political and economic freedom, was also less accepted and less widespread.
- This diagnosis calls for serious reflections on prevailing international economic and social policies, on ideas that shape the relationships between affluent and poor countries, and on strategies of international organizations for dealing with

the problems of the developing countries. Such critical assessments have long been advocated by those who have felt that market forces alone are insufficient to confront the profound issues of poverty. Today, the international intellectual and political establishments, including in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are questioning some of their major assumptions about ways for promoting development and reducing poverty.

- The Triglav Circle has chosen to contribute to the reflection on progress, development, and poverty by adding moral and spiritual perspectives to the analysis of those same issues debated in international, governmental, and academic circles. This work is in its early stages of articulation. It is aimed at developing a coherent set of concepts and methods of inquiry. The need for examining the ethical foundations and likely “ethical deficits” of current global policies, and the need to find ways to enrich, morally and spiritually, the prevalent vision of what constitutes the betterment of the human condition is unquestionable. This meeting in New Boston was a step in this direction.

Participants considered present approaches to poverty, different cultural and philosophical perspectives on this subject, and offered suggestions for an ethically and morally enriched framework for poverty reduction and wealth creation. The following paragraphs summarize major points made at the gathering. Four addenda relating to aspects of the topic are attached. They were contributed by members of the Circle.

### **The Multiple Dimensions of Poverty**

Economically defined, poverty is inadequacy measured in terms of indexes of per capita GNP and levels of consumption; it is also measured in terms of access to social services such as clean water and housing. Socially considered, poverty is an issue of exclusion, alienation, and the lack of empowerment to control one’s destiny. In some philosophical and theological orientations, poverty has been considered a virtue. Viewed from the same perspectives as the product selfishness and greed it is considered society’s shame. There is another kind of poverty, that of the spirit, the inner life, and of the creative imagination. Where this exists there is limited hope for human fulfillment.

Ordinary people have many different takes on the subject. When asked how they defined poverty and whether they were poor and why so, people offer different responses in different localities. Many people will say that they are poor when compared to others and that they lack various material things that others possess. Others, who appear poor to the outside world, say that they are rich because they own animals— if this is what wealth is based on their society.

In conclusion, poverty is a collective word embracing many connotations and conceptions.

To illustrate this point, an observation was made on the distinctive natures and expressions of poverty in Kyrghizstan and Mali. Both countries are similarly poor in terms of their annual per capita income of \$200 and other major socio-economic indicators of poverty. Despite their quantitative and statistical similarities, poverty in Mali was more noticeable than in Kyrghizstan when looking first hand at the two societies. A visitor to Mali will see many people just standing and milling around, seemingly without much sense of purpose. A visitor to Kyrghizstan will observe that everyone has something to do. The reasons for the differences in the experiences of poverty in these two countries must be sought on the planes of culture and spirit. The important point seems to be how the people feel about themselves and their influence on the environment.

The contrast between the poverty of Kyrghizstan and that of Mali illustrates an aspect of the statistical “tyranny of averages.” Poverty by all accounts is an open concept because of its multi-dimensionality. One risks premature closure in dealing with a poverty situation if one tries to pin a particular case down to a simple index; in other words, if one settles for the one or the other aggregate definition in a mass program for poverty relief. This is a serious dilemma for people in the field. It is difficult for government agencies and NGOs not to generalize poverty.

Although international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank have tried to come up with comprehensive conceptions addressing some complexities of income, their tendency has been to fall back on a socio-economic per capita definition correlated with education and health. This aggregate formula does not bode well for the success of their efforts to reduce poverty.

Policy makers, committed to reducing or eliminating poverty, must take into account the complexities and multidimensionality of the phenomenon and separate its elements analytically. Poverty has many causes, consequences, and correlates that have to be reflected in policies and actions combating it, if they are to succeed. The Circle evoked many facets of poverty that underscored the complexities of the subject:

- The present “third wave of globalization,” marked by expanding, intertwining nets of telecommunications and finance, and other vast technological changes, are making it ever more difficult for the poor to participate in the global community. To participate they require not only basic needs but modern technology and the capacity to use it.
- The spiritual, ethical and cultural dimensions of life and society threatened by the cultural homogenization facilitated by the technological revolution should not be overlooked. There must be scope for cultural diversity as the poor are brought into the global-economic environment. People must not be obliged to lose their cultural identities, time-honored values—in short their souls—to swim competitively in the global sea.

- Change in the situation of the poor requires first and foremost education and opportunities for fulfillment and decent work.
- It is important to consider that often the poor, while they know that they do not have what the wealthy have, do not necessarily consider themselves inferior. To listen and to understand the perspectives of the poor and to respect their dignity are *sine qua non* for any successful development policy.
- Poverty comes in absolute and relative forms. These distinctions are vital to successful policy making. Absolute poverty is registered in the lack of fundamental basic needs, starvation, and other serious deprivations. Relative poverty is a phenomenon of inequality and is almost impossible to eradicate, particularly in a market society fueled by unregulated competitive forces.
- Poverty is often accompanied by social stigmas. Many poor, people in rich as well as poor countries, are victims of social exclusion. Eliminating poverty in such situations demands that donors consider what the poor need to become respected members of their societies.
- Poverty reflects on all kinds of issues in life, making it very difficult to get a handle on all the relevant factors in a particular situation. Therefore the decision maker needs humility. To work against deeply rooted poverty takes long-term devotion and comprehensive policies. It is important to live with poor families to get to know them and to understand their world-view.
- There is a generational dimension to poverty entailed in changing desires, needs, and expectations. In earlier times, people, when asked the question about what they needed to be satisfied in life, spoke about others and necessities and desires to make good relationships with these people. The present generation is preoccupied by its individual needs. The lack of concern for the “other” today in society makes it difficult to obtain the necessary resources to address the poverty issue.
- Presently, there is an overflow of information in all societies, thanks to the communications revolution. At the same time, wisdom and creative imagination appear to be in increasing deficit on all levels of societies trapped in limited instrumental rational thinking. Policy makers must begin to address this advancing impoverishment of the mind and imagination. Societies must try harder to stimulate the powers of thinking and imagination of children. Such imagination must be able to conceive high ideals for the world as well as an ideal person. Such thinking should be free of politically expedient and monetary considerations.

- The notion of poverty of the spirit should loom large in efforts to overcome material poverty in societies. Economic growth and materialism can lead to declines in the vitality and virtues of the human spirit if societies do not try to prevent this from happening. In a fragile society these declines risk undoing or bringing to naught constructive material assistance. They even threaten the vitality of democracy as a way to life in a society.
- There should be recognition that frugality, sacrifice, service, and compassion are essential to a society, playing an important role in its capacity to deal with issues of poverty within itself and within other societies. It could be argued that when a society proposes to its members the pursuit of wealth and power as its overarching goal, poverty unavoidably follows. This is because not all individuals can succeed in such a competition; because solidarity and redistribution, notably through progressive taxation, are rejected; and because where wealth provides social status, poverty is lived as a stigma of personal failure. Most significantly, a societal project of this sort—the pursuit of wealth and power, being profoundly all consuming and material, tends to relegate humankind’s capacities for love and selfless pursuits into the shadows of existence, and thereby clears the way for the creation of many forms of spiritual impoverishment while being unable to eliminate material poverty in its absolute and relative varieties.

### **Poverty and the Common Good**

Poverty, in the large sense, implies lack of the means for human fulfillment. Human fulfillment requires basic human goods such as family, health, friendship, education, security, work, play, freedom of religion, etc. While each person must, on her/his own, find the path that leads to human fulfillment in such a way as not to compromise her/his own fulfillment or that of others, it is also the case that the social, economic, and political systems of any civilization have a duty to ensure that all of its citizens enjoy the opportunity for fulfillment. Otherwise the systems will exist for their own sake and humans will be mere means in a process rather than the ends they should be. A person lives in poverty or is poor, therefore, who neither possesses basic human goods nor has just means of obtaining them.

Just as poverty here is defined in a way that expands it beyond the narrow confines of a person’s economic position, so too wealth needs to be understood in a similar way. Thus contrary to the prevalent perception of the day, wealth is not the possession of material riches or social/economic/political power. A person is wealthy when she/he is able to achieve human greatness, that is, when a person is “great-souled.” A great-souled person is one who uses her/his own possession of true human fulfillment to help others to understand it and to help others to obtain it.

Thus, poverty and wealth do not so much explain what a person has or possesses as what a person is. Some people with a great deal of economic or other powers are really poor in that they have not attained human fulfillment. Indeed their very use or rather misuse of power suggests the disease they feel and the search they pursue. Some people with very little economic power do find fulfillment and even greatness in life because they rely not on the fleeting and often dangerously deceptive powers secured by financial wealth and political and social position, but because they are at their core persons of integrity, justice, truth, and goodness.

The reduction of poverty, then, must be understood in such a way as to respect the person for whom the effort is undertaken as someone who needs assistance in obtaining and retaining all the basic human goods. It is the responsibility of the wealthy, that is, the great-souled, to assist the poor.

### **Remarks on Poverty in Different Cultures and Regions**

#### ***Islam***

There are various Islamic interpretations of the term "poverty". From its beginnings, Islam has been concerned about the attainment of just societies. Thus, poverty is imbedded in the concern for social justice--distributive and redistributive. One of the main pillars of the religion is the "Zakat", which is the contribution of a minimum of ten percent of one's income to the poor. In stable traditional communities, people knew each other's needs and tried to address them by sharing crops and food when lacking money. Some wealthy members of the society donated parts of their estates for social causes including alleviation of poverty.

.Muslim societies differ in histories, national resources, levels of development, and in the place of the poor in society. The combination of oil wealth and religiosity, as in the case of some of the Gulf countries, has been an important factor in generous attitudes and practices on the part of the state as well as of individuals and families who have the means. In countries such as Egypt and Syria, military coups brought about governments concerned with social justice. However, the approaches they utilized, such as land reform and nationalization of the economies, brought about dampening effects on private philanthropy. The sense of obligation to share wealth disappeared because of the loss of resources and the slogans demonizing the wealthy.

Poverty is an important cause for the idealists from the educated classes in Muslim societies. The search for just societies pit Islamic groups against governments they see as corrupt and insensitive to the conditions of the poor. The resentment grew under conditions of authoritarian governance that suppressed expression. People will not be denied the ability to organize. When open and public avenues are prohibited, clandestine organizations emerge, and that has been the case in many Islamic groups.

Two qualifications are important. First is that the poor themselves are not participants in the organizations mentioned above, or in the violence they carry out from time to time. The poor are the least able to organize or to mobilize the resources necessary for such collective actions. Second, is that poverty is not the only cause for Islamic organizations. They are also motivated by what they perceive as serious injustices in the power structures in their countries as well as in international relations.

### ***China and the Confucian Tradition***

From a Chinese perspective, poverty is an issue that should be considered in the light of human happiness and dignity. Instead of listening to this traditional idea, the West is imposing its own opposite idea. Western replicas displace traditional homes, claiming that theirs are more civilized. The people ask why global powers are asking them to do something against their will. But poverty is attached to western ideas of human inferiority. In other words, poor circumstances are attributed to the person and make the individual look pathetic. This is an unfortunate error, since in reality it is the actual circumstances that are pathetic.

Contrary to the Western World where poverty is not to be tolerated and inequality is tolerable, in China inequality is considered more serious than poverty. The emphasis is therefore, on equality in China. One of the strategies for the reduction of inequality is for the well-developed provinces to feel responsible for less affluent provinces. Poverty in China is likened to frugality, which is an important virtue. Monastic frugal life is an important virtue. Poverty is something to live with. Relief work, on the part of the affluent part of the community, is an obligation for the well being of the community. Vegetarianism is exercised because the availability of meat is limited. Recognition of the scarcity of resources is respected.

Freedom in China is linked to dignity and justice is linked to freedom: freedom leads to justice. Responsibility and duty are as important as human rights and freedoms. It is the duty of the rich to be friendly, benevolent, and sympathetic to the poor. To enrich means to educate and education is the main priority in a poverty reduction program. And that priority includes developing “habits of the heart.” The more powerful individuals are, the more control they have over a situation and the more they are obliged to help others. The

entitlement that often goes to college graduates in the West is never justified in the Confucian tradition. Students are obliged to do something for society with their education. More education means more responsibility for others. Social democracy embraces three representations:

- The party respects the most advanced society.
- The most advanced culture is both traditional and modern.
- Well-being is for the overall majority of the people.

### *Japan and Shintoism*

In Japan, both the older and younger generations experienced poverty in WWII and its aftermath. They worked together to build a rich material society. The present generation has been born materially rich and many suffer from a poverty of the spirit because of it.

There is both a light side and shadow side to Japanese culture. Two hundred years ago in the Edo Era, the Japanese separated their inner personal life from their surface life and the kimono symbolized this distinction. The solid color represented a material culture of simplicity, while the inside of the kimono was drawn full of rich colors and designs, symbolizing a rich inner life of spirit. A model of this form of dualism is offered in the life and clothing of the great poet, Matsuo. He stopped working to live like a beggar. On the outside he looked poor. The exterior of his Kimono was black. His inner life was concentrated on the wealth of his artistic and spiritual well-being. The inside of his kimono was ornate and richly colored. By his fame and recognition he illustrates that in one's outer life it was highly respectable to be simple, even poor, as long as the inner life is spiritually rich and creative.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese society has changed under Western influence. The notion of the inner richness and external simplicity is long forgotten. Today, virtue means to be satisfied with one's property and not to have more than one needs. Poverty is one of the most problematic aspects of modern society. Welfare is insufficient and suicides are occurring every day among the poor. Modern problems of poverty are in most respects generated by urbanization. Children are showered with wealth and material things in the modern cities, while the old and the poor are pushed into the shadows, where they disappear in the darkness.

Thus modernization has undermined the inner affluence of the human spirit so esteemed two hundred years ago. Today, Japan faces the problem of social disintegration, which challenges the stabilizing forces of society. Japan shows that by relating man and capital as resources in the economic way of life, society fails to understand the cultural, linguistic, and spiritual aspects of life, which are being subsumed in the economic machine.

## *Latin America*

Origins of the type of material poverty endemic to Latin America can be traced to the Spanish conquest of this continent, which brought with it a colonial system that endured for three centuries. It laid the foundations for present societies and their social and economic problems. The majority of Native Americans died from the wars of conquest, from imported germs, and from forced labor. Together with the millions of African slaves imported to the New World, they formed an underclass of captive workers overseen by a feudal class with the blessing of the Church. The Spanish colonial system was hierarchical with all power residing with the crown in Spain. The descendants of the Spanish conquerors owned the land and enjoyed the privileges of a wealthy aristocracy. Eventually the local elites decided that they wished to rule the New World exclusively for their own benefit. Independence achieved just that. Few advantages were gained by the native population or the African slaves. In fact, the condition of the Native Americans became worse because they had once had an element of protection under the Crown. They were now completely at the mercy of the landed oligarchy.

In Mexico, the Indians, constituting the majority of the population, became feudal serfs working in the “haciendas” of the rich, with no freedom of movement and eternally in debt. If a worker tried to flee, the rural police would bring him back for punishment because he was attempting to escape from his financial obligations. In the 1860s, the political and social movement called the Reforma brought some significant changes. The liberals broke the power of the Church and confiscated the vast lands owned by the Church, but instead of an agrarian reform with land going to the peasants, it went to the rich hacendados. By the time of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the peasants were virtual serfs who now demanded “Land and Liberty.” The Chiapas rebellion of our day is a sign that the Agrarian Reform of the Revolution has not yet solved the problem of poverty in the countryside.

The poverty of the descendants of the Native Americans can be observed today in the heavily Indian populated countries of Central America and the Andean region. The conquest continues in the form of repression and killing of hundreds of thousands by the rich elites with the support of the United States. In countries such as Colombia, poor farmers have turned to growing coca in order to survive. The cities have grown enormously with people escaping violence in the countryside and looking for a better life. Millions live in urban poverty in most large Latin American cities, and crime has flourished to the extent that it is unsafe for the affluent to move freely without personal protection.

There are more billionaires proportionately in Mexico than in the United States. This tends to be the case in Third World countries, where the fortunate few fear to fall into the sea of poverty surrounding them. The rich are living more and more in protected enclaves

and travel with bodyguards. In Sao Paolo, one of the two or three largest cities in the world, helicopters crisscross the city ferrying rich passengers to their offices: it is too dangerous for them to travel the streets of the city. In Rio de Janeiro paramilitary forces have systematically killed large numbers of children who had become petty criminals in order to survive.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Argentina was a nation that dreamed of competing with the Colossus of the North. By the end of the century it was obvious that it could not compete even with Canada. In the last few years Argentina has experienced an economic meltdown, and today the once proud Argentineans are in a desperate economic situation. For a country with a well-educated, largely middle class population to suffer such a precipitous fall may be largely due to the economic and social structures inherited from Spain. The vast majority of Latin Americas will continue to live in poverty until they have a share of the land and of the assets of their rich nations.

### **Present Policies and Programs to Reduce Poverty**

Present efforts to eradicate world poverty have been dominated by neo-liberal thinking. International institutions refer to poverty as a condition of people in developing countries, and also as a condition of these countries, themselves. These countries are conceived as low income or “poor countries.” Commonly, poverty is defined in relation to the availability of a certain level of wealth—note for example, the famous “one billion people with one less than a dollar a day” of the World Bank. Poverty reduction is seen in terms of reaching targets and material measures of economic success. Governments operate along the same logical lines. They identify poor regions and communities, poor urban areas, pockets of poverty, and poor and vulnerable groups.

Concomitantly, progress towards poverty reduction is identified with changes in a number of material indicators, including income per capita, level of infant mortality, enrollment ratios, prevalence of slums, numbers of telephones and televisions, and access to the internet. The non-material dimensions of the human spirit are virtually irrelevant in this equation, albeit human dignity is construed to be dependent on achieving a certain level of wealth and “development.”

The per capita GNP comparisons used to distinguish rich from poor countries, carried out by national and intergovernmental organizations, do not, in reality, describe much about the poverty in a particular country. This figure lumps together the correlates, concepts and effects of poverty, obscuring multiple different indices, including those which reflect a culture, a standard of living, and a quality of life. The realities of poverty are multidimensional, extraordinarily complex, and its correlates vary greatly from situation to situation, as illustrated, for example, above in the comparative example of Kyrgyzstan and Mali.

Nevertheless the simple quantifiable indices are operationally convenient and, to many minds, the only practical means according to which one can gauge the efficiency and efficacy of progress. However, too much emphasis on these criteria risks “premature closure” of the subject. Moreover, because these operational indices give direction for financial and technical assistance and do not grasp the deeper currents underlying some of the gaping realities of the phenomenon, development and relief programs often miss their targets and meet with failure.

While current efforts of international organizations and governments to reduce or eliminate poverty in the developing world are based on a certain number of explicit and implicit values, the “ethical imperative” mentioned at the Social Summit has never been fully defined. Some elements have, nevertheless, been discussed and some organizations are actually practicing along these lines.

Solidarity is one of these elements, but the practical consequences of “solidarity” among and within countries are left largely unexplored. Solidarity tends to be associated with private initiatives—the traditional charity—and with the role of non-governmental organizations.

The link between reduction of poverty and the questions of stability and peace is sometimes mentioned, more so since the events of 9/11. While there is much evidence, that the poor countries and poor people are willing to take risks because they have no hope and nothing to lose, poor countries are not *ipso facto* fertile grounds for unrest and terrorism. Terrorism comes in many forms and expressions of frustration, and humiliation. Poverty certainly facilitates the task of recruiters but so does xenophobia, fundamentalism, and general injustice in the world. The movers and shakers of terrorist organizations are rich and well fed. To hold the poor around the world as a cause of global terrorism is narrow and wrong. It is a modern version of the 19<sup>th</sup> century identification of “working classes” with “dangerous classes.” It would make fear one of the motives for trying to “help” poor people and poor countries. While such fear can lead to effective policies it does not bode well for an harmonious and well integrated society.

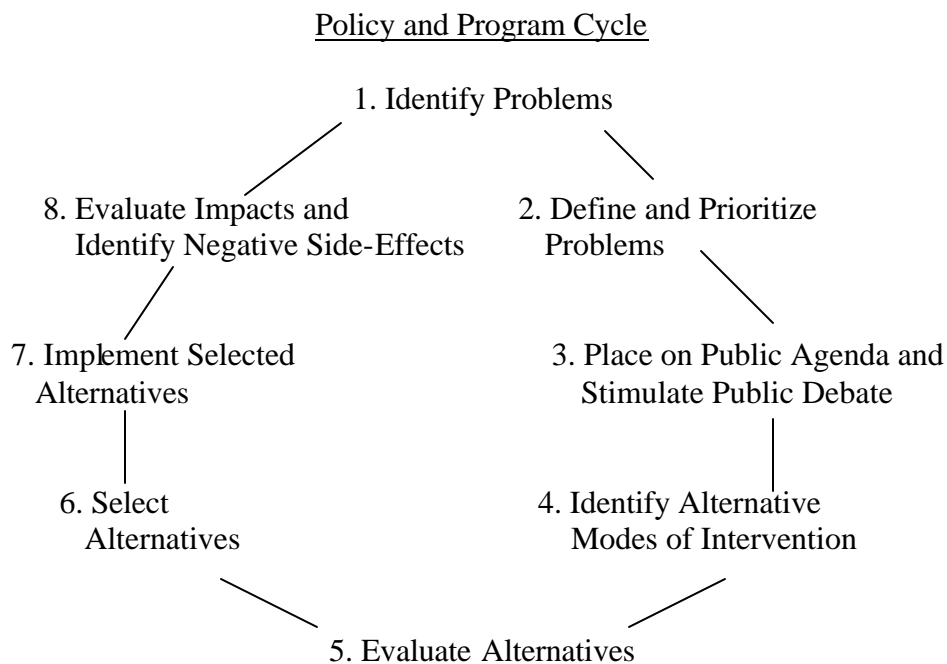
The need for social integration and cohesion is often mentioned as justification for bringing people to a level above poverty. Very noticeable since the last decade is the fact that the reduction or elimination of poverty is presented in international documents and by governments themselves as requiring no particular sacrifice on the part of the countries or social groups who happen to be wealthy. Redistributive measures are no longer on the agenda. This is unfortunate even, if only, one accepts the argument that because of poverty there is considerable waste of unused talent, energy, and creative imagination that would otherwise be useful for economic growth and the flourishing of society.

It should be emphasized in this context that there are numerous private “not for profit” organizations at the international and national levels, which advocate the reduction of poverty and actually express solidarity with the poor. These groups seem to be operating on the basis of traditional values, such as charity, compassion, sympathy and the belief in social justice, and offer effective and ethical models for future policy makers. These experiences and other research on poverty offer a large spectrum of ideas and resources for developing another framework for poverty reduction programs and policies.

### **Elements for an Ethical Framework for Poverty Reduction**

#### *The rational model of decision-making and ethical elements*

The rational development of public policies and programmes to reduce poverty can take different paths. Lasswell’s policy program cycle was the one considered by the Circle. The cycle consists of eight stages: problem identification; problem definition and prioritization; placement on public agendas and stimulation of public debate; identification of alternative modes of intervention; evaluation of alternatives; selection of alternatives; implementation of selected alternatives; evaluation of impacts and identification of negative side-effects, as illustrated below:



Note: In presenting this model to the Circle, Saad Nagi stated that Lasswell’s (1956) rational policy and program cycle offers a useful framework for discussion and analysis. The above model combines Lasswell's rational policy and program cycle with additional specifications. No country follows this “ideal” process in the formulation of policies and their translation into programs. However, there are major variations in the degree to which countries approximate or deviate from it.

Other sequences in rational processes of decision-making are of course possible, but the critical point to underscore is that the resulting policies, programmes, and measures ought to be multi-dimensional and multi-jurisdictional.

Ethical issues arise in all phases of such a cycle. For instance, the identification of the problem of the dimensions of poverty in a particular community or in the world as a whole can be done with rigor and a desire for accuracy and completeness, or can be done with laxness. It can be undertaken from very different perspectives, including the preferences of the elites, attempts to balance the interests of various social groups, or an effort at a scientific approach to policy-making. Even the gathering of data on poverty is not a neutral exercise. The choice, treatment and presentation of statistics on poverty and the poor involve implicit or explicit ethical and political choices.

Obviously, some problems may be common to all phases in a cycle while others can be specific to one or several phases. Ethical issues are particularly important to address in stages that might incur problems of exclusion, integrity of information, and the involvement of the professions in gate-keeping decisions consequential to everyone but especially the poor who are not in any position to fend for themselves.

#### *Other ethical considerations*

In general, because the origins, manifestations, and consequences of poverty are diversified and often complex, strategies and actions to address these problems ought to reach the economic, social, and cultural realms as well as the dimensions of the human spirit. They must also be directed to local, regional, national, and global levels; and they must mobilize a variety of actors, including the poor themselves. In practice, very few if any governments, societies, even international organizations, are willing or perhaps even able to comprehend and act upon such a comprehensive scheme. Catalogues and articulations of required measures are never complete. Many countries do not go beyond an imperfect identification of their poverty problems.

Also ethically challenging is the fact that poverty is generally assessed from the viewpoint of the elites. It would be better understood and addressed from the perspective of a fair appreciation of a balance of the interests of the different groups that constitute a society, or, for that matter, the different regions and countries that make up the world. This determination of a just balance of interests implies that the poor— individuals, groups or countries—are able to organize themselves and have the opportunity to articulate and present their interests and views.

That possibility exists only in a few countries. At the global level, the United Nations is only an embryo of what could become in the future a forum where the poor would be able to make their voice heard. At present, the civil society, notably through initiatives such as the Social Forum initiated in Porto Alegre, Brazil, a few years ago, is the major force in favor of a more just world order.

### *Political institutions, ethics, and poverty reduction*

A causal link between reduction of poverty and the practice of democracy is attractive intellectually. But history and also logic show that material poverty can and has been reduced, contained, and eliminated by authoritarian regimes. Enlightened or not so enlightened despots are perfectly able to feed and house their subjects. Nazi Germany, for example, had little unemployment.

However, only authentic democracies in terms of political and social values and institutions are truly in a position to address effectively the question of poverty because the well-being of individuals and communities as a whole must include material and such non-material elements as freedom, autonomy, self respect and social recognition. But “authentic democracies” are not numerous today. The trend seems to be in the direction of plutocratic regimes that neglect social justice and solidarity.

Moreover, it would seem that any regime, including democracies, needs to use some form of technocratic rationality to address the poverty issue, even to “balance” fairly and effectively the views and interests of the different social groups or classes. Elected officials and civil servants would ideally be motivated to attempt to understand as “scientifically” as possible the problem of poverty and the public and general interest. One must be aware that use of the word “scientific” in the context of policy making requires careful phrasing. It is to be noted that the scientific approach to policy making for the reduction of poverty has been largely discredited by the ineffective attempts of communist governments to run societies.

In addition to desirable improvements in overall policy making to reduce poverty, it is necessary to develop some form of “ethical training” for different trades and professions. Ethics and rationality are not necessarily at odds in such an approach. But “training in ethics” has to be done in full recognition of the fact that morals cannot be taught like mathematics and computer science. Moral principles and moral inclinations are alive when rooted in the culture of a community and when transmitted through its social institutions, traditionally families, schools and churches. It is perhaps the weakening of these institutions and the rise of new institutions with a different agenda that explain a need for the “teaching of ethics.” Here, this line of debate meets discussions that took place in previous meetings of the Triglav Circle.

### *Prerequisites for developing an ethical framework*

To conclude the report on the May gathering, and to generate reactions and further exchanges, here is a brief listing of what would appear to be prerequisites for the elaboration of a framework.:

- ***Intellectual curiosity*** is essential to framing a more effective approach to the question of poverty. Such curiosity is required if one is to become aware of the many dimensions of poverty and of its various manifestations—and meaning for the people concerned—in different regions, cultures, and periods of history. The reverse, intellectual conformity such as “group think” and its frequent corollary “cognitive dissonance” result in simplistic slogans—such as the “less than a dollar a day”— and in the abuse of averages and aggregates.
- Equally necessary are ***intellectual rigor and honesty***. Such qualities are essential for those attempting to measure poverty as well as for those designing and implementing policies to reduce it. Facile over-simplifications of the type “economic growth will take care of poverty” and “the poor are those who do not seize opportunities and are lazy”, or, at the other end of the ideological spectrum, “poverty is an intrinsic part of the current form of capitalism,” lead to inaction or to unbalanced and ineffective policies. One needs intellectual rigor, for instance, to analyze different stages of a “policy and program cycle”, or, as Saad Nagi put it in addendum 2 below, to understand the implications of the fact that “poverty is a continuum within a continuum.” Incidentally, this latter point is one of the explanations for failures of “targeted” policies and measures.
- ***Intellectual curiosity and rigor have in themselves a moral dimension***. Or, at least their opposites—intellectual laziness and intellectual sloppiness—render difficult and improbable, moral or even ethical behavior. In the words of Peter Marris, in addendum 2 below, “the oversimplification of poverty is morally obtuse.” But curiosity and rigor reach the moral level that is necessary to fully comprehend poverty and the poor only if these qualities are shaped, oriented, and illuminated by imagination, compassion, and respect for the intrinsic dignity and worth of each human being. Perhaps this could be termed ***spiritual empathy?*** Or ***generosity of the spirit?***
- At a high level of perfection, such ***spiritual empathy or “love”*** enabled saints and other profoundly dedicated persons to “be” with the poor, to identify with them in a manner that transcends and “eliminates” poverty. Charity, at its best, stems from such empathy. Collectively, in the realm of the polity and of politics, it seems that this “ingredient,” this source of inspiration and generosity of the spirit—underpinning notions of social justice and solidarity—is also a requirement for meaningful “treatment” of the question of poverty. Hence, *a contrario*, the failure of policies emanating from either a cynical, technocratic or plutocratic view of human affairs. And, an aristocratic view would not suffice either, at least if we share the views expressed during this meeting on the relations between poverty reduction and the pursuit of democratic ideals.

- Moreover, an ethical framework for poverty reduction requires *individual and collective capacity for creativity and growth*. Economists talk about production, productivity, growth, supply, demand, and efficient markets. Sociologists evoke “demonstration effect,” the role of media, and the different conceptions of equity and equality in distributing the fruits of human labor. Moralists deplore “productivism” and “consumerism,” and analyze the notions of “need” and “satisfaction.” But, notwithstanding differences in concepts and language, it is evident that provision of an “economic base” [ what Kenneth Galbraith has underscored as necessary to the individual and to the collectivity for any “decent life” and therefore for any non-material pursuit], is the fundamental element of this ethical framework that has to sustain any serious effort at poverty reduction.

Finally, an ethical framework for poverty reduction implies an holistic perception of life and society. The familiar problem is the tendency of dominant societies of our time to transform provision of an economic base into an absolute, to consider it the center and circumference of the poverty reduction policy, because it is the most obvious, the most measurable and the easiest to transform into an attractive political program. This being the case, intellectual curiosity and intellectual rigor are given over to the service of a truncated vision of the individual and of society. And, spiritual elements of empathy and love are placed in a different realm, disconnected from what “really matters” in the management of human affairs. How to transform this understanding into a source of inspiration and firm guidance for thinking and action is an age old challenge. The quality and depth of such understanding has always to be questioned, deepened, and attuned to its time in history. To take on this task requires a great deal of humility and courage given the spirit of the times.

*These notes were prepared by Barbara Baudot, coordinator and president of the Circle, with the help of Ashley O’Leary, student and research assistant at Saint Anselm College. Contributions were also gratefully received from Sofia Heine-Ellison, Jacques Baudot, Saad Nagi, Gustavo Alfaro, John Fortin, and Peter Marris.*

## **Addendum 1**

### **Confucius and the Cultivation of Social Judgment**

by J. Peter Kulka\*

"The Great Learning," which could be Confucius's testament, states that the ability to make wise choices is rooted in self-knowledge based on observation of one's inner realities. To attain enlightenment, one must go back to the origin of a problem and define one's reaction to it. Categorizing the inarticulate influences (emotions, attitudes, intuitions, etc.) permits one to bring them into balance by self-discipline and conscience. Having brought order into one's inner world, one can then make a sound decision consonant with one's responsibilities to the outer world. Confucius also noted that the process leading to enlightened judgement is enhanced by watching with affection how people grow.

A realistic awareness of inarticulate influences on one's thinking is difficult to attain. Mankind is prone to self-deceptions that serve to maintain self-esteem during the prolonged dependence of childhood. Such defenses tend to become ingrained and habitual, particularly if they continue to fulfill inner needs, and it requires prolonged effort to give them up. Positive experiences are always helpful since they reduce dependency on false premises to sustain positive attitudes toward life. In addition, various ancillary methods have proved useful in facilitating the process of surmounting irrational thinking. Honest exchange with trusted individuals is particularly helpful, but special techniques, such as meditation, may be decisive in effecting remedial transformation. The handicap of unrealistic thinking might be ameliorated by optimal mother-infant security and by incorporating the advancement of emotional intelligence into the educational system.

From a biologic point of view, we are slowly beginning to understand the cerebral dynamics underlying self-deception and self-realization. Of particular significance is the evolutionary disparity between the lifestyle to which the human mind has become genetically adapted over millions of years and the radically different conditions of life that increasingly rapid cultural change has brought about over the past ten thousand years. Now that we have become our own worst enemies, we must find the discipline to govern ourselves or the survival of the human race will remain in jeopardy. We must learn to live up to the social heritage that has allowed our species to dominate the earth and practice the principle of mutuality, helping to strengthen others and thereby strengthening ourselves.

\*This is unfortunately the last contribution by Peter Kulka to the Triglav Circle. Peter passed away in August of 2002.

## **Addendum 2**

### **Reflections on the Discussion of Ethics and Poverty at the Triglav Meeting on 2- 3 May 2003**

by Peter Marris

#### ***The Importance of Disaggregating the Idea of Poverty***

People have basic biological needs for food, shelter, water, and health care. We also have basic psychological needs for self-esteem, belonging, meaning. (A meaningful life requires that we identify with some endeavor more enduring than ourselves, whether it is expressed through the ideals of a social movement, a religion, the survival of a lineage, or the perpetuation of a culture). These needs are always met, or not met, in a social context. We need security, rights, respect, and these social needs are also basic. These three kinds of needs are interdependent, but the interdependence is not hierarchical. It is often assumed that basic biological needs must be met before psychological or social needs can be considered. But psychological and social needs are equally important, and may take precedence, depending on the circumstances. For instance, someone may choose honor over survival, sacrifice their share of food for the sake of another, risk illness to fulfill their duty as a doctor or nurse. Or someone may prefer a way of life that provides respect and belonging to an innovation that would undermine that way of life, even though it promises relief from poverty. Loss of a sense of meaning to one's life can be as lethal as starvation.

Since these needs are interdependent, people lacking basic biological needs are usually also treated with little respect, just as those without security or rights are unlikely to be well fed. But aggregating poverty invites the use of single measures, which are taken as representing all kinds of basic deprivation. For instance, the World Bank uses a dollar a day of income as a minimum below which anyone in the world might be defined as poor. It corrects for the differences in living costs between countries by estimating what a dollar will buy in each country, creating a measure of purchasing power parity. By this measure, the Bank sees a substantial reduction in world poverty over the last few years. (The measure is largely meaningless, firstly because the dollar is assumed to buy more in developing countries, where labor and services are much cheaper. But these are services the poor cannot afford, so their cost is irrelevant to them. Secondly, many crucial nations were excluded from the count.) No such crude measure can demonstrate anything, except perhaps aggregate growth in an economy, which may or may not reduce deprivation of any of the basic human needs I have described. Such measures obscure the relationships between biological, psychological and social deprivation, and in doing so, promote a particular economic prescription for aggregate growth as the solution to all kinds of poverty. The result may be to increase many aspects of poverty.

### ***Autonomy and Interdependence of Needs***

It is very difficult for an outsider to understand how basic biological, psychological and social needs can all be met in a society other than one's own. A middle class American understands a set of relationships in which individual effort is rewarded in a labor market that also confers respect and belonging, within an ideology of capitalistic nationalism, offering a sense of identification with the world's most powerful nation. None of this is transferable to any other country, or even to many minorities in the United States. When the ideologues of the Bush administration claim that democracy and free enterprise have been shown to be the only viable prescription for the well being of the whole world, they deny the relevance of any culture but their own. But people can reconcile their biological, social and psychological needs only within a context of values, expectations, and possibilities which makes sense to them. To do that, they need to be in charge of their own lives. They need enough autonomy to be able to choose relationships that are meaningful to them, relationships which fulfill their purposes and reflect their values and in which they believe they can trust. No outsider, however well intentioned, can impose such relationships on anyone and hope to have them assimilated without great psychological damage and social disruption.

When people cannot create a structure of relationships which fulfills these needs, they will be attracted to other worldly ideologies which promise fulfillment only in some future life (for instance, in a heaven); or to movements which project their frustrations on an external enemy (such as another ethnic group, or America, the Great Satan). Both reactions are, I think, morbid, in the sense that they distort or inhibit the struggle to create, in the present, relationships, which can satisfy basic social, psychological and biological needs.

### ***What Are the Ethical Implications?***

The oversimplification of poverty is morally obtuse. Anti-poverty policies have to respect the autonomy of poor people. Policies need to increase their control over assets, their power to create and sustain their own relationships, and to respect the integrity of the values which matter to them. This implies tolerance and humility in those who seek to help. It does not imply cultural neutrality: there are widely held values which denigrate women and deny their autonomy, for instance. But the more people enjoy a sense of autonomy and control in a context of relationships in which they feel respected and accepted, the more their own values are secure, the more they will be willing to let other people also enjoy the fulfillment of those same basic needs. So I believe.

## Addendum 3

### Poverty Concepts and Measurement

Saad Z. Nagi<sup>i</sup>

However defined and measured, poverty is a ubiquitous social problem that has afflicted societies throughout history in varying prevalence and intensity. While its impacts are felt primarily by the poor themselves—individuals and households—, they also affect the prosperity, peace, and security of human communities from local to global. In addition to moral foundations, the negative realities and ramifications to communal life underlie the collective concern at all levels about the search for, and implementation of, approaches to the reduction of poverty and the alleviation of its consequences. The very title of this workshop and its substantive agenda are clear indications of the widening scope of the geographic community of concern. Abundant, timely, and accurate information is crucial to the success of related policies and programs in reaching these objectives. The attempt in this paper is to contribute to the store of needed information. It is organized in five parts: (I) Concepts, indicators, and measurement; (II) A comparative context; (III) More on “poverty in Egypt”, (IV) Explanations and correlates of poverty; and (V) Approaches to poverty reduction.

Imbedded in theology and moral philosophy, most early literature on poverty was prescriptive, pointing out needs and urging charitable assistance. The meaning of poverty and the identification of the poor were based on *geshtalt* understanding and primary group relations that were sufficient when the provision of assistance was primarily by religious establishments and communal organizations. The ever-increasing involvement by more centralized political and administrative authorities, at provincial and national levels, in poverty-centered policies and programs created a need for systematic operational definitions of poverty and for ways to identify the poor that are applicable to wider populations. The trend was aided by the advent of surveys and other forms of research on the topic. Thus, the definitions, indicators, and measures of poverty have considerable theoretical, pragmatic, legal, and political implications.

There is a plethora of verbal and operational definitions of poverty: absolute and relative; from subjective and objective perspectives; in economic and other socio-cultural terms; in the form of simple classification for the purpose of “nose count” or with attention to severity of deprivation; and using one or multiple dimensions. Analyses and critiques of these concepts and measures also abound (Sen 1981, 1987; Ravallion 1992; Carvalho and White 1994).

*Basic needs* constitute one of the earliest and remains a common approach to defining and measuring absolute poverty. As early as the turn of the century, basic needs were considered to be food, clothing, and housing (Booth 1892; Rowntree 1901). Biologically oriented definitions and indicators centered around food, nutrition, caloric needs and

intakes, anthropomorphic measures, especially the relation between weight and height. In 1965, Orshansky developed the US Social Security Index of Poverty based on *cost estimates of minimum food requirements*. This translation of biological needs into an income variable fulfills the economist's dictum that "it is command over resources (income) to satisfy needs that a poverty definition should be concerned with rather than the actual consumption of some specific goods." (Hagenaars 1986). A standard for nutritional needs was developed in the form of an "Adult Equivalent Unit" (AEU) that balances differences by age, gender, and activities.

Poverty lines were also determined by including the *costs of other basic needs* such as clothing, housing, and at times necessities such as fuel. Orshansky (1965), however, points out that "there is no generally acceptable standard of adequacy for essentials of living except food" (quoted in Hagenaars 1986). Even the FAO/WHO reference-person food requirements are contested (see Lipton 1988). One simple method, which avoids consideration of other basic needs, is based on food costs only, which are then related to "Engle's Coefficient" (Engel 1883). This Coefficient represents the *proportion of income spent on food*. The ratio of food costs to income has been widely used in marking lines for absolute poverty (Watts 1967; Rosenthal 1969; Love and Oja 1975; Deaton and Muelbauer 1980; Van Praag et al. 1984; Hagenaars 1986).

Two important problems are characteristic of these measures: the arbitrary selection of ratios to define the poverty lines, and a proper determination of nutritional needs and their costs.

*Incomes and expenditures*, for individuals and for households, are used as indicators of poverty in both *absolute and relative* terms. Expenditures are narrower in scope but are considered more reliable. Cutting points to define absolute poverty remain arbitrary. However, indices such as the "Gini Coefficient", which is based on income distribution, provides useful comparative data on inequality. Other relative measures include percentiles of income distributions as well as averages of aggregated incomes or expenditures. Relative definitions of poverty link deprivation to the general standard of living in a society (see Stoeffler, et al. 1949; Runciman 1966; Fuches 1976; Rein and Beattie 1974; Townsend 1974; Lansley 1980). From this perspective, poverty exists until the Gini Coefficient in a society reaches zero that is, complete equality.

Relative definitions have the advantage of retaining the social context within which poverty is measured. They distinguish among different income groups and are also sensitive to the distribution of income among the poor; that is, they provide information about gradations of poverty. On the other hand, as Sen (1981) put it, "the concept of poverty itself has an irreducible core of absolute deprivation...which translates starvation, malnutrition and visible hardship into a diagnosis of poverty without having to ascertain first the relative picture." Attempts have been made to combine the merits of absolute and relative definitions of poverty (Watts 1969; Takayama 1979; Thon 1979; Kakwani 1980; Blackorby and Donalson 1980; Clark et al. 1981; Sen 1981; Foster et al. 1984). With the

exception of Watts, all these attempts incorporate income distributions among the poor as part of their measures.

*Outcomes* such as infant mortality, life expectancy, and literacy, in contrast to inputs such as nutrition, have also been used to measure poverty as in Morris' (1979) *Physical Quality of Life Index* (PQLI). In addition to relying on usually more readily available data, this approach offers the advantage of avoiding the complexities of defining basic needs and assessing their costs. Nevertheless, questions are raised about its validity. As Sen (1980) observed "it would be difficult to claim that suffering from hunger does not affect one's quality of life unless one happens actually to die from it." A variation on this index was used in Egypt (Field and Ropes 1979; Morris 1979). It was comprised of data on infant mortality, literacy rates, and access to potable water (the latter used as a substitute for life expectancy at age one, for which information was lacking). Interestingly, none of the inter-correlations were sufficiently high for any of the variables to be used as proxies for each other. One conclusion reached by the analysts was that while having some construct validity, such an Index "may not be the most suited to Egyptian conditions." They suggested consideration of a much wider range of variables including income, employment, and land ownership in order to "establish a much richer index of popular well-being whose components have more than a logical relationship to each other."

In addition to *objective* definitions and measures such as discussed so far, several *subjective* approaches have also been used in the analysis of poverty. Essentially, these are assessments by people themselves of the adequacy of their incomes "to get along" or "to make ends meet." One strategy is to ask people about the average minimum income necessary for different types of households. The poverty line becomes the mean value of the responses for each household type (Kilpatrick 1973). Estimates can also be sought for the minimum income necessary for the needs of the respondents' own households. The poverty line, then, is determined by the relationship between perceived minimum income needed and actual income (Goedhart et al., 1977; Deleeck 1977).

Another approach is to seek information from respondents as to whether or not their households "experienced difficulties in meeting basic necessities such as food, clothing, housing, etc." and about the degree of such difficulties (Nagi and King, 1976). Subjective measures entail a number of assumptions and require careful interpretation. Although they may vary from those of an objective nature, nevertheless, they represent important data in themselves.

*Standard of Living* expressed in quantitative terms dates back to Sir William Petty and his book *Political Arithmetick* published posthumously in 1691 (Sen 1987). Over time, the concept has assumed increasing importance in the social sciences for its relation to such concerns as utility, preference, rational choice, consumption, demand, production, stratification and mobility, inequity, and poverty. The major issues surrounding the

concept and measurement of living standards were well articulated by Sen (1987) of which the following are particularly important:

1. Serious doubt is cast on conceptualization based on “utility,” which has been a cornerstone in economic thought. Sen examines utility as an object and as a method of valuation, and in terms of pleasure, desire, fulfillment, and choice. He points out the role of “subjectivism” in “the failure of utility to get very far,” concluding that: “Utility and living standards are related, but they are second cousins rather than siblings.”

2. As in the case of “real income,” “commodity possession and opulence” are considered as a plausible step in the direction of objective criteria. Sen concludes that: “The more exacting question is not whether this is the right direction to go, but whether taking stock of commodity possession is the right place to stop...Ultimately, the focus has to be on what life we lead and what we can or cannot do, can or cannot be...the standard of living is really a matter of ‘functionings and capabilities’, and not a matter directly of opulence, commodities, or utilities.” Sen recognizes that the various “doings” and “beings” a person achieves, and the capabilities to achieve them, constitute “an enormous--possibly infinite--list”.

3. There is an inherent dilemma in the conceptualization of complex phenomena such as living standards. The tension is between “relevance” and “usability.” Relevance calls for inclusiveness of dimensions in order to do “justice to the richness of the concept,” while usability and practicality “imposes restrictions on the kinds of information and techniques of evaluation that may be used.” In this respect, we quote again from Sen:

...in the evaluation of living standard, there are many intermediate positions between a complete ordering of all alternatives and the dominance partial ordering, which may be very incomplete, of the valued functionings and capabilities...The ambiguities in evaluations (even in identification of ‘contemporary standards’) may require us to be silent on some comparisons while being articulate on others.

4. Distinctions need to be made between components or dimensions of a concept, on one hand, and its causes on the other. The distinctions here would be between the definition of living standards and factors that affect their distributions.

5. Caution is urged in regard to aggregation. The “overall ranking of living standard is only one way of seeing this evaluation. Sometimes the assessment of particular components of the standard of living may be of no less interest.” This cautionary note applies to both types of aggregation: (a) conceptual by combining increasing numbers of dimensions to form concepts at higher levels of abstraction and (b) population aggregation as in the case of moving from the standard of living of individuals to that of households, communities, regions, nations, etc. Although aggregation of either kind

broadens the concept's scope of application, it can obscure differences among individuals and collectives that may be of central importance to the objectives of the analysis.

Sen's influence is echoed in recent reports of international organizations. The United Nations Development Programs's Human Development Report (1996) introduced an index of *Capability Poverty* built on indicators from four areas: health and nutrition, reproduction, education, and housing. Further, The World Bank's World Development Report (2000/2002) includes indicators of political disadvantage such as empowerment, participation, exclusion, and discrimination. Poverty is described as follows:

Poor people live without fundamental freedoms of action and choice that the better-off take for granted. They often lack food and shelter, education and health, deprivation that keep them from leading the kind of life that everyone values. They also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, and natural disasters. And they are often exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state and society and are powerless to influence key decisions affecting their lives. These are all dimensions of poverty.

In conclusion, several additional points need to be considered in a discussion of concepts and measurement of poverty. *First*, needless to say, socioeconomic conditions, well-being, standards of living, and other related concepts represent continua on which poverty represents the lower levels. Thus, poverty is a continuum within a continuum. Two important implications flow from this. One is that poverty is not a homogeneous category, but includes varying depths and severity. The other implication relates to establishing cutting points in a classification scheme. It does not require keen observation to identify the extremes of deprivation and affluence, but the challenge has been establishing boundary markers for sustainable livelihood (Chambers and Conway 1992). The task is rendered more complex by the fact that classification is contextual (Kaplan 1964) and that the classification of poverty may vary depending on the contexts of analysis, policies, and programs.

*Second* is the issue of sensitivity of measures, about which two points are particularly important. One is that whatever the criteria, the cutting points they establish on the continuum will have ambiguous cases on both sides. In other words, there is an element of arbitrariness in the selection of cutting points -- a problem characteristic of classifying quantitative continua in general. Moving from these "artificial" toward more "natural" classes can be enhanced through empirical testing of the theoretically expected relationships of the variable created to other variables. The other point concerning sensitivity is that of precision: while micro-measurement is essential for many purposes, it is unnecessary in others such as attempting to measure distances between towns in meters. Serious attention needs to be given to precision, but it must be balanced with the open nature of a concept such as that of poverty.

*Third*, is the distinction between poverty itself on one hand and its causes and consequences on the other. This is a difficult task rendered more problematic because of the currency of many expansive definitions that incorporate causes and consequences.

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## **Addendum 4**

The following is a letter from Christian Balslev-Olesen who is currently serving as the representative of UNICEF in Eritrea. Although he cannot attend the meetings for the moment he has made the following contribution to the report of the May meeting. It consists in a letter conveying an excellent report on poverty. The introductory material is given below with Christian's letter. The introductory material contains a hyper link to the web cite of the source of the report.

Dear Barbara,

Thanks for your Triglav Note on Seeking an Ethical Framework for Poverty Reduction.

I have read the Note with great interest and would just like to say I would very much have liked to be with you during the meeting 2 – 3 May.

But it seems difficult for me to attend your meeting now I am in Africa!

I like your Note and the contributions from different people attending the meeting.

I only have one observation: I would have liked to present and reflect some of the Christian contributions to the whole issue – I have special in mind the study you yourself took part in and made substantial input to: Christianity, Poverty and Wealth.

For your reference I have enclosed the text, which was published last year. Hope you can find some inspiration from that text.

Looking forward to hear from you. Unfortunately I have no planed visit to New York for the time being. But would let you know next time I am in US.

Best regards to both of you

Christian

# **CHRISTIANITY POVERTY & WEALTH IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**(A Prototype World Church Report)**

**The findings of 'Project 21'**

**with a Foreword by**

**Konrad Raiser**

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## FOREWORD

Fighting poverty has moved back into the centre of the international agenda after having been over-shadowed for some time by a primary emphasis on policies of structural adjustment and incentives for growth. In preparation for the UN conference on social development (Geneva 2000) and the Millennium Summit of the United Nations the target of reducing poverty to half by the year 2015 has been adopted as a benchmark by all international organisations involved in social development. Recent meetings, like the UN conference at Monterrey on Financing for Development have given rise to new doubts whether there is the political will to work towards reaching these goals.

The Christian churches have been involved in the struggle against poverty long before the proclamation of the first development decade. Traditionally, the churches' response has been characterised by the work of charity without challenging the political, social and economic structures that are the root causes of poverty. Over the last more than 30 years the ecumenical community of churches has become more and more involved in the development debate. It has sought to spell out what it means to be a 'church in solidarity with the poor'. It has sponsored studies on 'patterns of poverty' and engaged in advocacy programmes challenging the root causes of poverty.

Even though the biblical tradition is much more explicit about excessive wealth and the ways it can corrupt human community, the Christian churches have been reluctant to address the ethical and spiritual issues related to wealth. In some traditions wealth has been regarded as a sign of divine blessing, often with the implication that the poor are to blame for their poverty. Today, these views are being defended by churches that proclaim a 'prosperity gospel'. At the same time, however, ecumenical discussion has begun to focus attention on the hidden links between poverty and wealth. Just as it has become common to speak of a 'poverty line' there should be a limit beyond which the accumulation of wealth becomes greed and is no longer ethically and socially acceptable. This would mean calling for an 'economy of enough'.

The geo-political changes during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the accelerating process of economic globalisation have obliged the churches and ecumenical organisations to rethink the principles, objectives and methodologies guiding their participation in development. The project 'Discerning the Way Together', sponsored in the years after 1993 by the World Council of Churches with the participation of four Northern church related development agencies and four networks of Southern partners reinforced the need for further critical reflection.

Here is the origin of the initiative leading to the present publication. It began in 1997 when the World Council of Churches and its ecumenical partners in the Association of Ecumenical Development Agencies in Europe (APRODEV) initiated a process of case studies in order to gain a better understanding of how churches, agencies and ecumenical organisations could respond more effectively to poverty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Eventually 19

country studies were commissioned with a clear priority on countries in the Southern hemisphere and complemented by five issue studies. All studies followed a similar methodology. The objective was to give voice to the people who are exposed to poverty and not to add to the plethora of academic research publications or political action programmes. The outcome of 'Project 21' was intended to be informative and also challenging with a clear emphasis on the role of the churches in the broader struggles against poverty.

The story of 'Project 21' is told in the last chapter of this book. The main body of the publication represents a summary of the findings of the 24 case studies. The structure is clear and self-explanatory with each chapter being introduced with a caption highlighting the main contents. Much of the information emerging from the case studies is not new or surprising for those who are familiar with the ecumenical development debate. However, the book makes a specific contribution by including wealth and greed alongside poverty in its investigation, by placing the churches into the wider ('ecumenical') context of civil society, and by arguing for the need to form a global advocacy alliance for eradicating poverty.

Considering strategies for stimulating effective action by the churches, those responsible for 'Project 21' developed the proposal to issue in regular intervals a 'World Church Report on Poverty and Wealth' to complement the development reports by UNDP and the World Bank. Instead of tables and statistics this church report should reflect the specific experiences of people in local contexts. Published every 3-5 years the report would allow for an assessment of how far the churches have been able to meet the targets set. And in fact, the present book which is presented as a 'prototype' of a future World Church Report includes a list of 10 goals for the churches' action until the year 2015 (see p 97). These goals are an attempt to develop a clear strategy for combating poverty and greed.

The project has set a very ambitious goal for itself. It is unavoidable that a report of this kind will leave many gaps and that its conceptual and methodological assumptions may be open to challenge. However, in spite of the disclaimers included in the report itself, this publication represents a very significant effort to arrive at a common framework of interpretation which is the very precondition for building a global alliance in the struggle against poverty. This book invites critical discussion in order to learn from such reactions how to improve the conceptual framework of a World Church Report on Poverty and Wealth.

Konrad Raiser  
General Secretary, World Council of Churches  
May 2002

## INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seemed an appropriate moment to ask whether churches were bringing good news to the poor and going about it in the right way. Over 24 countries were part of this study project initiated by the Association of Ecumenical Development Agencies in Europe (APRODEV) in collaboration with the World Council of Churches and nicknamed 'Project 21'. Twenty four case studies were written. Nineteen of them were based on countries (Bangladesh, Chile, China {Hong Kong}, Colombia, Fiji, Germany, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Palestine, Philippines, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Uganda, West Indies). Five of them focused on particular subjects (the labour movement, liturgy, transnational corporations, the especially disadvantaged position of women, the United Nations). In writing them, rich and poor, high and low, activist and official, lay and expert were asked for their views. All the case studies are available on the Project's website: [www.aprodev.net](http://www.aprodev.net)

The Project involved several meetings of the case study writers and a major Colloquium in New Delhi in November 2000 which produced an interim 'Working Document'. The full story of the Project is told in chapter VIII.

Chapters I-VI draw together what the 24 case studies had to say. Where they are quoted, their English (often their second or third language) has not normally been changed. Chapter VII sets out 5 priorities and, in the light of them, ten '2015 Millennium Goals' for the churches. They are designed to complement the UN Development Goals not to copy them; though, like them, they represent a more urgent challenge than the date 2015 might suggest, which is why they are reproduced at the front of this book as A Call to Action. They include a proposal for a 'World Church Report on Poverty and Wealth' to be published every 3-5 years. The following pages have been written up as a 'prototype' to illustrate what such a World Church Report might be like and how it could be produced.

Michael Taylor  
Director 'Project 21'  
June 2002

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<sup>i</sup>1. Excerpt here presented was part of a larger work prepared for the Workshop on "Poverty and Social deprivation in the Mediterranean Area: the local, national/regional, and global dimension" organized by The Comparative Research on Poverty (CROP)/UNESCO and Democritus University of Thrace, Komotini, Greece, June 2003 by Saad Nagi Professor Emeritus of Sociology, The Ohio State University; and former Professor and Director, the Center for Social Research, American University in Cairo.