

Chapter 4

Ending Extreme Poverty in Rural Populations

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, attention shifts to the locality and context of extreme poverty in rural areas and sheds light on the challenges rural people face to overcome poverty. Due to limited information, inadequate access to markets and social services, and lack of opportunities to take ownership of productive assets, little is known about how populations overcome their struggles in extreme poverty in rural areas. The discussion exemplifies the need to examine culture, politics, and the social-historical context in which poor people live. The chapter concludes that rural poverty and the challenges to eliminate its causes and consequences are associated with lack of education, land and livestock, infrastructural technical support, the absence of good enough governance, as well as inability to secure non-farm alternatives to diminishing farm opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

The overarching argument that runs throughout this chapter contends that the relatively bounded nature of extreme poverty, as conceived in Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, i.e., End poverty in *all its forms* everywhere), is a governance and institutional problem. The underlying assumption is that overall poverty is the result of economic, political, and social processes that interact with each other and frequently reinforce each other in ways that exacerbate the deprivation of resources and privileges within which context poor people live. Therefore, the most important task in our time is to ensure that the living conditions of the world's poorest improve and to end extreme poverty. To ensure that 'no one is left behind' as the SDG agenda promises, this is where we need to focus our efforts. Ideally, people living in poverty have access to shelter, food, clean water, and basic services provided by family, charity, government, and pro bono organizations. However, people living in *extreme* poverty are severely deprived of basic human needs and often have little or no access to social wellbeing.

This chapter begins with the assumption that community involvement and participation in people's well-being is not a universal solution to all development problems, particularly the lack of basic needs

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in rural areas. Usually, poverty is a concept intrinsically linked to people's welfare – and there are many ways in which one can try to measure welfare. Because rural populations' needs are closely linked to the economy in a significant way, public policy must be at the center of scrutiny regarding the welfare of rural people's wellbeing. Notably, rural poverty is a product of poor infrastructure that hinders development and mobility. Since most rural communities in Africa are non-industrial and rely on agriculture for their food and survival, rural communities are dealt a serious blow because often poor rural areas tend to lack enough roads that would increase access to agricultural inputs and markets.

The institutional backdrop we imagine in the context of lack of roads, agricultural inputs, and markets has to do with efforts that multiple actors, such as, social, political, cultural, or religious actors engage in various local arenas, wherein rural people's entitlements to roads, food and markets are negotiated, sustained or not sustained at all, or ignored completely, at micro or macro levels. In its most general sense, rural poverty is the lack of necessities. Extreme poverty can tentatively be defined as the point at which necessities are so dire or seriously depleted below those commanded by the average individual or family. The poor are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities that are taken for granted by the average individual or family. Lack of necessities, also referenced in some literature as the lack of basic needs, has been extensively discussed by known scholars such as Streeten (1984) and Stewart (1985).

Analysis of overall poverty, and related issues, such as access to land and credit, education and health care, support services, and entitlements to food through well-designed public infrastructure programs and other social welfare transfers are centrally of major significance to serious critique (Khan, 2000). The cumulative experience of seeing poor people in rural areas suffer or die, moved this author to critically examine the causes of rural poverty, the role of African governments and of Global rich-country's policies, and the possibilities for the future. In sum, the outcomes of these observations, ideologies or theories of why rural people are poor echo the overarching theme of this chapter. It is painstakingly noted however that claims or explanation of who is poor and who is not, couched in bias, myth, or misconceptions of poverty, can become engrained and may lead to the ways in which poor people are perceived or treated. See chapter 3.

When we talk about extreme poverty in rural areas, we are not limited to income poverty. Instead, poverty has many dimensions—and each dimension impacts the poor in a variety of ways, including low quality of life and social wellbeing; inability to withstand shocks resulting from seasonal changes, hunger, and catastrophic illness (Streeten et al., 1981). Though the term “poverty” carries significant meaning, at the same time it lacks specifics. In chapter 1 of this book, for example, the author introduced the multiple dimensions of poverty, which has so far been referenced using different qualifying appellatives of state of being in poverty.

Some of the references of poverty included, (1) End “poverty” in *all its form* everywhere, in reference to Goal One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (U.N. Assembly, 2015); World Bank, 2000; or (2) “extreme poverty” (Jalan & Ravallion, 2000; (3) World poverty (Pogge, 2005); (4) Absolute and overall poverty (Gordon & Townsend, 2000); (5) Chronic poverty (Hulme & Shepherd, 2003); Bird, et al., 2002); (6) Transient poverty (Jalan & Ravallion, 2000; Lwanga-Ntale & McClean, 2004); and (7) Persistent poverty (Barrett, Little, & Carter, 2013; Santos & Barrett, 2011).

These multiple references reaffirm the complexity and multidimensional characteristics of poverty—namely the many ways in which people can be deprived from quality life and well-being. Each nuanced concept of poverty adds to the complexity of the causes of poverty and may obfuscate meaning or introduce some implied bias in some contexts. In a world where political power is unequally distributed

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