

Chapter 12

Future Pathways Out of Poverty in Rural Areas and Elsewhere: Towards a Conclusion

ABSTRACT

Previous chapters showed that there is no magic strategy to alleviate poverty or eliminate poverty completely in every community. This chapter presents the closing arguments of “why people are poor” and what poor people might do in the future to overcome their poverty trap. We ask, which way forward do Africans envisage as a future pathway out of chronic poverty in the 21st century? This question forms the central themes of this chapter and has provoked lively debates among villagers as to the successive stages of household progress from extreme poverty to economic self-reliance. Such moves in and out of poverty are apparent when looking at poverty in either absolute or relative terms. Hence, how can we ensure a more diverse, inclusive, and sustainable future for all?

INTRODUCTION

Chronic poverty is one of the worst problems that the world faces today and an existential risk to the future of humanity. Chronic poverty is a result of a set of interwoven economic, political, and social (stratification) forces. The factors and processes that trap diverse groups in persistent poverty, and the households in which they live, vary among countries. In its broadest and multi-dimensional sense, the chronically poor are likely to be poor in several ways, not only in terms of income (Hulme & Shepherd, 2003). The poorest people in the world are those always poor and those who move in and out of poverty, with the latter group tending to be strikingly large. They are often hungry, have less access to education, regularly have no light at night, and suffer from poor health. Diverse groups include those experiencing deprivation because of their stage in the life cycle, those discriminated against because of their social position in the community or household, those with health problems and impairments, and people living in remote rural areas, urban slums and regions where prolonged violent conflict or natural disasters or insecurity have occurred. We ask what poor people might do in the future to overcome poverty trap.

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Since there is no sure pathway out-of-poverty for each community, who will be the African pathfinders and trailblazers of rural poverty in the years to come? Hence, how can we ensure a more diverse, inclusive, and sustainable future for all?

Changes in returns to endowments, consisting of all people's assets which households may possess, can be a potent source of increased incomes, and can lessen poverty while seemingly transitory shocks can have long-term consequences. Therefore, to make progress towards poverty reduction becomes one of the most urgent global goals to pursue, and governments or households cannot achieve the global goals alone. Equally, there is a certain level of mistrust of governments, underlying a sense of fatigue and political despair in rural areas. For many countries in Africa, it seems the era of futuristic slogans that promised utopian wellbeing like "freedom and hard work; or "freedom and unity" and "prosperity for all", are gone. The promise to the poor of slipping out of poverty one day and taking a pathway to economic success in the future seems to be fading further away every day, and the prospect of economic prosperity disappearing for good.

In the case of rural Tanzania, for example, development experts have been criticized for offering wrong diagnosis and policy prescriptions not in tune with local aspirations and hopes for a better future. The coffee crop has failed on the experts' watch; the cotton farms are struggling; the cash crop of sisal (recently revived by Chinese investors) had long been forgotten; food markets to sell products for small farmers are far away to reach or have limited access! Many people live on the verge of hunger and deprivation and are vulnerable to the next economic shock. The weather is uncertain, roads and bridges are impassable, and the rivers have been either dry or flooding; they do not have water when you need it the most.

Poverty reduction is concerned with the living conditions of the worst off: those who live in extreme poverty. In this volume, we argued that chronically poor people are a heterogeneous group, and as a diverse group are particularly susceptible to chronic poverty, because they are likely to experience multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities. In addition, it is argued that the tightest possible definition of chronic poverty would include intergenerationally transmitted (IGT) poverty, which, while it may or may not be severe, is likely to be relatively intractable, and therefore is more likely to escape future poverty reduction efforts. See chapter 6. For this reason, IGT poverty is both a characteristic and cause of chronic poverty (Moore, 2001).

In the quest for future strategies or programs to end poverty, we must consider new rationales and frameworks to respond to three areas of concern: (1) What leads individuals and households to fall into extreme poverty? (2) What prevents individuals and households from escaping from extreme poverty? (3) What might enable individuals and households to escape extreme poverty in the future? (Barrett, 2005). Other questions that compliment these three areas of concern and tend to persist include: Are development programs reaching those most in need, or are they primarily benefiting those who are easier to reach, leaving the poorest behind?

Thomas (2000:43), summarized the debates about development that framed these concerns into four main positions: (a) Neoliberal theories positively elaborating on the development of capitalism; (b) theories, arguing that development is necessary alongside capitalism (e.g., removing barriers to participation, social development, etc.; (c) structural and people-centered development alternatives to capitalism; (d) rejection of development (post-development and post-modernist thinking). These distinctions make explicit the complexity of the construct and shows the difficulty of analyzing the conditions of specific groups of poor people in different countries. Table 1 summarizes the "causes" of chronic poverty. See also, Table 1.6: Bradshaw's matrix of causes of poverty in chapter 1 of this volume.

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