Conceptualizing urban poverty

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SUMMARY: This paper explores three issues. It first examines how, and by whom, poverty has been defined and measured, contrasting conventional economic and participatory anthropological approaches. Secondly, it questions the extent to which "urban poverty" differs conceptually from poverty in general. How far is analysts of the urban-rural divide helpful in understanding the underlying causes of poverty? Finally, the paper reviews the principal ways in which urban poverty has been understood in South and North, and the policy prescriptions which flow from such an understanding. It concludes by identifying the linkages between alternative definitions of poverty, different urban anti-poverty policy approaches, and the choice of measurement techniques.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF this paper is to review the different ways in which urban poverty has been understood, and to assess the implications of such an understanding for the measurement of poverty and the design of anti-poverty programmes.

For economic and demographic reasons, during the 1980s and 1990s poverty has become increasingly concentrated in urban settlements. Economic crisis and structural adjustment policies introduced in the Third World have had a disproportionate impact on the urban poor, due to rising food prices, declining real wages and redundancy in the formal labour market, and reduced public expenditure on basic services and infrastructure. As a result of rapid urbanization, within the next two decades the proportion of the world's population living in towns and cities is set to overtake the proportion living in rural areas for the first time. Thus, the numbers of urban people in poverty are likely to be growing at a faster rate - and in parts of the world are already greater in absolute terms than the numbers of poor rural people. Whereas in 1980 there were twice as many poor rural households as poor urban ones, by the year 2000 more than half of the absolute poor will live in towns and cities.

While the global demographic shift to urban areas is undisputed, predictions about the urbanization of poverty are based on a multitude of controversial assumptions regarding the defi-
URBAN POVERTY

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the CROP International Workshop on Urban Poverty in Bergen, Norway, 6-9 October 1994. I am grateful to Christine Whitehead for her helpful comments on the manuscript. Any errors remain my own.


4. According to "best estimates", the percentage of the world's population living in urban areas was 29.3 in 1950, 37.7 in 1975 and 43.1 in 1990. It is predicted to pass the 50 per cent level at some point between 2003 and 2020 - the date depending on the rate at which countries urbanize which, in turn, for all but the most urbanized countries, is strongly associated with the strength of their economic performance; (personal communication with David Satterthwaite, Human Settlements Programme, IIED).

5. Over half of the population of the following regions already live in urban areas: Northern and Western Europe; North, Central and South America and the Caribbean; the Middle East and North Africa; Southern Africa; East Asia including China; and Australasia.


II. DEFINING AND MEASURING POVERTY

WHAT IS POVERTY and who should define it? Most definitions associate poverty with a "lack" or "deficiency" of the necessities required for human survival and welfare. However, there is no consensus about what basic human needs are or how they can be identified. Two main approaches are discussed here: conventional economic definitions which use income, consumption, or a range of other social indicators to classify poor groups against a common index of material welfare; and alternative interpretations developed largely by rural anthropologists and social planners working with poor rural communities in the Third World, which allow for local variation in the meaning of poverty, and expand the definition to encompass perceptions of non-material deprivation and social differentiation.

III. CONVENTIONAL DEFINITIONS

a. Definitions Based on Income or Consumption

FEW ECONOMISTS WOULD argue that human welfare can be adequately described by income alone. Yet, in practice, income (or consumption) is the most frequently used proxy for welfare. The justification is that (in market based economies) income is highly correlated with other causes of poverty and is a predictor of future problems of deprivation. Underlying the economists' concept of poverty is the idea of merit goods: goods that society agrees are necessary, and is prepared to ensure that members of society can achieve. This is less problematic in the North, where poverty is generally a minority problem, than in the South, where it can be argued that the majority fail to achieve the minimum acceptable standard of living and that society lacks the capacity to make good the deficit.

Income is defined as command over resources over time or as the level of consumption that can be afforded while retaining capital intact. People are classified as poor when their income (or consumption) is less than that required to meet certain defined needs. For example, the World Bank's World Development Report uses two income cut-off points or poverty lines: those with an income per capita of below US$370 per year (at 1985 purchasing power parity) are deemed poor, while those with less than US$275 per year are extremely poor. In 1994, 1.390 million people were estimated to fall into the "poor" category, Within countries, income and consumption data have been used
by the Bank to distinguish different groups such as the “new poor” (the direct victims of structural adjustment), the “borderline poor” (those on the brink of the poverty line, who are pushed under it by austerity measures), and the “chronic poor” who were extremely poor even before adjustment began. In addition to calculating the headcount index (the proportion of the population below the poverty line), the Bank assesses the severity of poverty by calculating the poverty gap index (the ratio of the gap between the poverty line and the mean income of the poor expressed as a ratio to the poverty line).

Income defined poverty lines are problematic for a number of reasons. Income is a useful indicator if we want to identify which people are likely to lack the resources to achieve a socially acceptable standard of living. However, it does not measure accurately their capacity to achieve access (which may be influenced by other factors such as education, information, legal rights, illness, threatened domestic violence or insecurity).

Incomes are commonly analyzed at the household level. Yet, individual members of a household do not have equal command over resources, and those with low entitlement to consume resources (due, for example, to their age, gender or social status) may be hidden within relatively prosperous households. Moreover, adjustments have to be made in order to compare households of different size. Which is poorer: a family with two adults and five children living on US$ 2,500 per year, or a single adult with an annual income of just US$ 400? Using the World Bank criterion of US$ 370 per capita, all seven members of the larger family would be classified as poor, whereas the single adult would not. Per capita incomes take no account of the economies of scale which benefit the larger household (such as savings on cooking fuel by preparing food in bulk) or the particular needs of people of different ages or different gender roles. Nor is it easy to value home production or earnings from self-employment, which are generally assumed to be important income sources for the “urban poor”.

Needs are equally difficult to define in a standardized way. The items which people regard as essential are influenced by culture and personal preference, and vary from individual to individual. Warm clothing and heating may be required to keep an old person alive in a London winter but these would be unlikely priorities in Mombasa.

Both needs and living costs may vary considerably between rural and urban areas, and between urban settlements of different sizes. Certain basic items - including fuel, freshwater and building materials - have to be purchased in most urban areas but can be obtained free (apart from the opportunity costs of time and labour spent in collection), or are much cheaper, in many rural areas in the South. Rural dwellers can, in addition, obtain some of their food free from common lands, forests, rivers, lakes or coastal waters - although subsistence agriculture is widespread in urban areas, rent is often payable for the land used. Dietary preferences are likely to vary according to location: in cities there is greater availability of imported foods, promoted through advertising; different working patterns (includ-
ing, in many countries, higher female participation in the paid labour force) which make it convenient to purchase prepared meals and snacks; less space at home in which to cook and entertain friends and relatives, reinforcing the need to purchase prepared foods from outside; and possibly some variation in caloric requirements. It has been estimated that urban food costs are generally 10-15 per cent higher than those in rural areas.\textsuperscript{13}

Typically, housing costs are far higher in cities and are a major expense of urban households. In larger cities, people who work in or close to the centre face a trade-off between living in cheaper housing on the periphery and the high monetary and time costs of transport from the suburbs. The poor tend to pay proportionately more for their housing than the better-off, since the unit cost of renting small areas of accommodation in overcrowded, unserviced and dangerous neighbourhoods near the centre can exceed the costs of renting the same amount of accommodation in a higher quality area (the problem for the poor is that accommodation in up-market areas is available in larger, non-divisible units or in locations inaccessible to those relying on their feet or public transport to move around).

In recognition of these differences, it is common to use separate cut-off levels for urban and rural poverty. However, this is a crude refinement, and cannot capture accurately the diversity of needs and entitlements co-existing within urban and rural populations.

b. Absolute and Relative Definitions of Poverty

If poverty is defined in absolute terms, needs are considered to be fixed at a level which provides for subsistence, basic household equipment, and expenditure on essential services such as water, sanitation, health, education and transport. The absolute definition is in common use by the World Bank and governments. However, it does not describe the extent of income inequality within society nor the fact that needs are socially determined and change over time. The absolute definition has to be adjusted periodically to take account of technological developments such as improved methods of sanitation.

The concept of relative poverty is more flexible, and allows for minimum needs to be revised as standards of living in society alter. It reflects the view that poverty imposes withdrawal or exclusion from active membership of society: People are relatively deprived if they cannot obtain "... the conditions of life - that is the diets, amenities, standards and services - which allow them to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customary behaviour which is expected of them by virtue of their membership of society."\textsuperscript{14} Under this definition, there could in theory be a higher incidence of poverty in London, New York or Tokyo than in Delhi, Lusaka or Rio de Janiero. In contrast, very few of the destitute and homeless people living on the streets of London could scrape under the World Bank's absolute poverty line, which is set well below the minimal social security benefit level for UK citizens.


c. Definitions Based on Social Indicators

Because many aspects of well-being cannot be captured adequately by income or consumption based measures, supplementary social indicators are sometimes used to define poverty, such as life expectancy, infant mortality, nutrition, the proportion of the household budget spent on food, literacy, school enrolment rates, access to health clinics or drinking water. Again, the idea is to have a standard scale so that different population groups may be compared. Such indicators are often used to contrast the welfare of rural and urban populations since they avoid the problem of rural-urban price differences.

Where a range of indicators are used to describe poverty, as in the World Bank's World Development Report, the different variables may tell conflicting stories about the pattern of deprivation. Thus, in practice, income and consumption measures remain the key way poverty is defined, despite the grave deficiencies of using any single indicator of well-being.

To overcome this, composite poverty indices have been developed which combine several weighted variables. For example, the UNDP's Human Development Index aggregates income, literacy and life expectancy into a single measure of the standard of living with a scale of values ranging from zero to one, along which countries can be ranked. Other examples include the Physical Quality of Life Index, the Food Security Index and the Relative Welfare Index. Such measures are arbitrary and "aggregate what we should wish to disaggregate". They inevitably miss out important aspects of well-being, since a limited number of variables can be brought into the calculation. Moreover, they view poverty from the perspective of external professionals rather than from that of the poor.

IV. PARTICIPATORY DEFINITIONS

STANDARDIZED DEFINITIONS ARE useful to policy makers because they provide a uniform scale against which comparisons can be made of the incidence of poverty in different sub-populations (urban and rural; urban populations living in different parts of the city; male and female headed households; old and young etc.) or of the same population over time. Comparative data are essential in order to target resources to the poorest groups. However, the standard of living of an individual or a household is a multi-dimensional concept involving, in principle, every aspect of direct consumption as well as non-consumption activities and services. The quantification of poverty invariably restricts the number of criteria used to describe it, so that the data provide only a partial picture of the reality of being poor. Attempts to use universal indicators (such as an income defined poverty line) can also be counter-productive in masking the structural causes of poverty.

Equally important, the use of a common index implies an external decision about who is poor. As Rahnema states, "There
Box 1. Defining Poverty using Social Indicators: Examples from Tanzania

Two recent studies of poverty in Tanzania used different social indicators to identify the poorest groups. In Sender and Smith's research in Tanga Region, an index of material well-being was compiled by listing 14 different possessions (such as a metal roof, a bicycle and a coat) and counting the number of items that each surveyed household owned.* Out of 100 households, just over half (53) had scores of 0-2, and only 15 had scores of over 10. The possessions scores showed strong correlation with access to the major means of production, work in the formal sector, female education and child mortality. Households with scores of 10-14 held six times the land acreage of households with scores of one or zero, were far less likely to sell (and far more likely to buy) land, were 30 times more likely to have an enumerated sector employee, were twice as likely to have at least one literate family member, and their children were ten times less likely to die.

In Mbeya District, Tanzania, the Health and Nutrition District Support (HANDS) Project used nutritional status among children under five years old to define urban and peri-urban poverty. Child malnutrition was found to be associated statistically with mothers who had no education and no monthly salary, families who had to sell maize from the last harvest, and families with poor housing and lack of assets.\(^b\)

Both research studies found correlation between their chosen indicators and other aspects of poverty such as landholding, access to education and health services. However, this is not necessarily the case. Ownership of possessions may be a matter of taste rather than a sign of constrained opportunity. As Piachaud points out, people who do not buy meat may be wealthy vegetarians.\(^c\) Similarly, small children may become malnourished for reasons other than a lack of material resources. Children over one year old, left in the care of siblings while their parents work, are particularly at risk because of insufficiently frequent feeding. Malnutrition may be more the result of the unequal gender division of labour and long working hours of mothers in Tanzania than of low income levels per se.\(^d\)


b. HANDS (1992), Health and Nutrition District Support Project.


Anthropological studies of poverty have shown that people's own conceptions of disadvantage often differ markedly from those of professional "experts". Great value may be attached to qualitative dimensions such as independence, security, self-respect, identity, close and non-exploitative social relationships, decision-making freedom and legal and political rights. This has led Francis and others to argue that to obtain an adequate definition of poverty requires involvement of the "poor" themselves.\[23\]

The genesis of gender planning during the 1980s has focused attention on the different poverty outcomes deriving from the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men and the gender relations between them. Socially constructed roles also constrain the opportunities of other population subgroups - such as the young and old, ethnic minorities and majorities, recent rural migrants and established urban residents, and different social classes - and their experience and perceptions of poverty are differentiated accordingly.\[24\]

From the 1970s, the conventional view that poverty can be defined in terms of income has been further challenged on the grounds that the environmental consequences of economic growth result in reduced human welfare, and that "traditional" frugal and self-reliant lifestyles are not inferior.\[25\]

a. Vulnerability and Entitlement

Participatory investigations have highlighted two concepts - vulnerability and entitlement - which add rigour to the conceptualization of poverty and greatly extend our understanding of the process by which people become and remain poor. Vulnerability is not synonymous with poverty but means defencelessness, insecurity, and exposure to risk, shocks and stress. It is linked with assets, such as human investment in health and education, productive assets including houses and domestic equipment, access to community infrastructure, stores of money, jewellery and gold, and claims on other households, patrons, the government and international community for resources at times of need. While poverty (measured by income) can be reduced by borrowing, such debt makes the poor more vulnerable. Chambers points out that poor people have a horror of debt, and are more aware than professionals of the trade-offs between poverty and vulnerability.\[26\] Failure to distinguish between the two concepts is harmful because it prevents disaggregation of the experience of poverty and maintains stereotypes about the undifferentiated mass of the poor. An understanding of how people deplete household assets or resources is helpful in explaining how the well-being of urban households can decline, even when there are improvements in labour market or production opportunities.\[27\]

Entitlement refers to the complex ways in which individuals or households command resources.\[28\] These ways vary between people and over time, in response to shocks and long-term trends. They may include wage labour, sale of assets, own production, reduced consumption and public provision of goods and services. Although the concept of entitlement was origi-
nally applied in the rural sector to the study of famine and hunger, it is useful in explaining how poverty affects different people - even within the same household - in different ways. This disaggregation is central to the analysis of household survival strategies during periods of stress, and their implications for the work burdens of women, men and children and intra-household resource allocation.\(^{29}\)

**Box 2. Participatory Assessment of Poverty: An Example from Pakistan**

A recent participatory poverty research study was undertaken in Pakistan. People in ten low-income communities were asked about their perceptions of poverty. Poor households were identified by respondents as being those without adult males and a large number of dependents; widows, especially those with young children; sick or disabled adults unable to engage in paid work; households with a large number of unmarried daughters (dowry costs are considerable for poor families and were identified as a major factor in perpetuating poverty); households where men are unemployed or engaged in irregular and poorly paid casual work; and households with debt bondage to landowners, employers, commission agents or informal money lenders. Powerlessness, helplessness, insecurity, absence of choice and lack of faith in official mechanisms and poverty alleviation programmes were common themes raised by respondents.

Although using a different methodology, the findings of the study corresponded with those of a quantitative poverty assessment undertaken simultaneously by the World Bank in Pakistan. The results are, therefore, complementary, with the qualitative research adding in-depth insights into the nature of poverty in different localities, while the quantitative poverty assessment shows the extent of poverty throughout the country.

*SOURCE: Beatt, Jo et al. (1993), “Social safety nets and social networks: their role in poverty alleviation in Pakistan”, report prepared for the Overseas Development Administration, 2 volumes, Development Planning Unit, University College, London.*

Participatory investigation is useful in identifying what increases risk of poverty, and the underlying reasons why people remain in poverty. It allows different types of poverty to be distinguished by drawing on the life experience of poor people. An in-depth understanding of the process by which people become deprived is not an inferior substitute for a large scale exercise to quantify poverty: it is prerequisite to devising anti-poverty programmes which address root causes of poverty and meet
people’s perceived needs. Not least, concentrating on poor people’s priorities challenges a dominant view of the poor as passive or irresponsible, and the patronizing assumption of experts that poor people are there to be planned for.

V. THE CONCEPT OF URBAN POVERTY: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE URBAN POVERTY debate is conducted on different planes in the Third World and Northern world. Historically, the development literature has focused on inequalities between poor rural and better-off urban populations, and the linkages between urbanization, the spread of capitalism and poverty. By contrast, poverty analysis in the North has been concerned with the problems of inner city or peripheral urban social housing estates, or with regional and sectoral unemployment and income inequality. Far less attention has been paid to the urban-rural divide.

In the colonial period, it was widely assumed that poverty in the South could be solved through urbanization and the transfer of labour from low-productivity subsistence agriculture to high-productivity modern industry. Development planners started to question the assumptions of this two-sector growth model during the 1970s. After decades of modernization policies, the benefits of growth had not trickled down to the rural areas where the mass of the population still lived. Lipton’s influential “urban bias” thesis blamed rural poverty on inequitable government taxation and expenditure policies which favoured city elites: rather than solving the problem of poverty, urban centres were depriving rural areas of infrastructure and resources.

Urban bias became a mainstream view among development agencies in the 1970s and 1980s. In many Third World countries, poverty alleviation strategies (including sectoral strategies for primary health care, water supply and education) were reoriented to improve living conditions in rural areas. From the mid-1980s, structural adjustment policies have reinforced these efforts by removing subsidies given to urban consumers and raising prices to market levels to favour rural producers.

However, recent research in the 1980s and 1990s has revealed great diversity in the extent and depth of poverty within the urban sector in the Third World. This has supported a backlash, with some writers counter-arguing that the depth of poverty is worse in deprived city slums than in rural communities. The availability of disaggregated urban poverty data, coupled with the recognition that urban growth is inevitable (and attributable more to the increase in the existing urban population than to a preventable process of rural-urban migration) is finally pushing urban poverty up the development agenda. The World Bank’s latest policy paper for the urban sector acknowledges that “...by the late 1980s, urban per capita incomes in some countries had reverted to 1970 levels and in some countries to 1960 levels.”

31. The urban bias argument has classical roots and can be traced back to Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations (1776). Lipton’s thesis has been developed by Robert Bates (Bates, Robert H. (1981), Markets and States in Tropical Africa, University of California Press, Berkeley) to construct a theory of “urban bias” for tropical Africa. For further discussion of the urban bias debate see Moore (1984).
33. Amis, Philip and Peter Lloyd (editors) (1990), Housing Africa’s Urban Poor, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York.
34. See reference 3, pages 45-46.
35. According to the Bank’s calculations, in 1988 there were...
The urban bias of the 1980s' economic crisis is revealed in ECLA estimates for urban and rural poverty in ten Latin American countries. While the proportion of Latin America's rural households living in poverty remained static or declined between 1981 and 1986, the proportion of poor urban households increased. In the late 1980s, the percentage of rural households in poverty was higher than the corresponding percentage of urban households. However, Table 1 shows that in terms of the absolute numbers of people involved, urban poverty was a greater problem in seven of these countries. For all ten countries, whereas in 1980, 48 per cent of the poor (53 million persons) lived in urban areas, in 1986 this had risen to 58 per cent (80 million people). The narrowing of the rural-urban differential is also recorded in Costa Rica and Uruguay.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Urban population as a percentage of the total population 1988</th>
<th>Percentage of households in poverty 1986-88</th>
<th>Ratio of poor urban: poor rural households</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
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<td>Argentina</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
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<td>Colombia</td>
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<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Costa Rica</td>
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<td>Guatemala</td>
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African data indicates a real decline in urban wages since the early 1970s, with a halving of real income levels in many cases and a general deterioration in urban employment security and benefits such as employer housing. The urban-rural income differential has sharply reduced and, in some nations (Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana), has actually been reversed. Falling urban living standards and a narrowing gap between poverty in rural and urban areas is also documented in Bangladesh.

In industrial Europe and North America, the majority of the population (and also most of the poor) has lived in towns and cities since the early twentieth century. Consequently, a longer tradition of poverty research in urban areas exists (see, for example, Rowntree[42]). Perhaps because urban images have been influential in shaping perceptions of poverty, "urban poverty" is seldom regarded by Northern researchers to be conceptually...
distinct from poverty in general. In the UK and USA, the term "urban poverty" is often used specifically to refer to concentrations of deprivation in inner city areas or peripheral social housing estates. However, Mangen's comparative study of social deprivation in inner cities suggests that this is not the case in mainland Europe, where inner city poverty is viewed as "a component of the overarching issue of marginalization" rather than as a separate issue.\(^{(41)}\)

VI. IS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL POVERTY USEFUL?

CONCEPTUALIZING URBAN POVERTY as a separate category from rural poverty is problematic for two reasons. First, the definition of the categories is arbitrary. And second, a dualistic spatial classification may have the undesirable effect of straight-jacketing discussion about the structural causes of poverty and diverting attention from national and international level (rather than city level) solutions.

If "poverty" is hard to define, then "urban" is just as difficult. There are no common criteria for deciding whether a settlement is a town or a rural village. The yardsticks include inconsistent population thresholds (settlements with over 1,000 people qualify as towns in Canada, but the lower limit is 2,000 in Kenya, 10,000 in Jordan, and 50,000 in Japan); the density of residential building; the type and level of public services provided; the proportion of the population engaged in non-agricultural work; and officially designated localities.\(^{(42)}\) Villages can be reclassified as urban areas when they reach a given threshold size, without any change in the lifestyles of the people who live there.

Furthermore, there is great heterogeneity in the nature of urban areas, their functions and the lifestyles of their people. Only one-third of the urban population in the Third World lives in cities with one million or more inhabitants.\(^{(43)}\) Do the people of a small Mexican town have more in common with the inhabitants of Mexico City (population 15 million in the 1991 census) than with those in surrounding villages? In China (which has an enormous impact on global urbanization statistics due to its population size), vast tracts of countryside are included in the catchment area of cities in order to provide reservoirs and hydro-electric power supplies for urban dwellers. Should peri-urban areas be classified as urban, rural, or neither category?

A strong case can be made for treating the urban-rural divide as a continuum rather than as a rigid dichotomy. First, human settlements clearly comprise a wide spectrum which cannot easily be reduced to two categories. The cut-off point for any such division is bound to be chosen arbitrarily. Moreover, there are linkages between the functions of cities, small towns and rural areas, which imply that the problems of one "sector" cannot be treated in isolation from the other. Interdependence between town and countryside exists in areas such as rural-urban migration and population growth, seasonal labour, the markets for food, industrial goods and services, water supply

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and demand, facilities for education, health care and recreation, flows of remittance income and family support networks. Individuals may cross back and forth between the sectors during their lives and extensive trading arrangements exist between the two. Intervention in one part of the system will have a range of repercussions, affecting other parts of the “same sector” as well as the “other sector”.

Secondly, concentrating on whether urban poverty is worse or more extensive than rural poverty diverts attention from structural determinants which affect the life chances of the poor in both sectors. These are likely to include the distribution of land, assets and human capital; socially constructed constraints to opportunity based on class, gender, race, age and disability; government social and macro-economic policies; external shocks such as famine and war; and external relationships which shape exchange rates, the terms of trade, economic sanctions (for example, during and after the Gulf war), debt repayments and the scope for domestic economic policies. Many of these fundamental causal factors cannot be tackled adequately by urban level interventions alone.

Thirdly, the acknowledgement of diversity in life-chances within urban settlements means that we have to disaggregate within the city in order to analyze and explain poverty. Once the city is studied as a series of interrelated but heterogenous neighborhoods or districts, the dichotomous categories of urban and rural become less relevant. It may be more useful to focus on different spatial categories such as inner city, suburb and peri-urban, or other types of categories such as tenure type, household type, social class, race, age, gender or level of education.

Bearing in mind these caveats, certain characteristics of poverty are closely identified with urbanization. These attributes of urban poverty can be grouped into four interrelated areas:

1. **Urban Environmental and Health Risks**: the special environmental and health problems faced by the urban poor result from the spatial juxtaposition of industrial and residential functions; competition for land, high living densities and overcrowded housing in hazardous areas; the speed of urban growth and the inadequate pace at which clean water supply, sanitation and solid waste disposal services are expanded; risks of traffic congestion and the inability to implement effective controls over pollution and accident prevention.

Urban settlements develop in order to group capitalist enterprises in a cost-effective spatial configuration. Many people are attracted to cities mainly by the opportunities for work. However, the externalities of urban production are borne disproportionately by the poor. Cheap housing areas and heavy industry both tend to be located on lower cost land in cities and, in the absence of effective planning controls, this proximity can cause special environmental problems. The Bhopal industrial catastrophe in India, which killed over 3,000 people, seriously injured 100,000 and caused 200,000 to be evacuated would not have affected so many people had the factory been situated in a sparsely populated rural area or a non-residential planning zone.
For people with very low earning levels, living on cheap land adjacent to economic opportunities is a rational choice, despite the risk. Yet, such disasters have enormous implications for the vulnerability of the poor, who may lose their homes, belongings, source of income and previous social networks if relocated.[46]

Box 3. Urban Pollution and Poverty: The Example of Alexandria, Egypt

Alexandria, the second city of Egypt, contains 40 per cent of Egypt's heavy industry. In the 1980s, the city's sewage was pumped, untreated, through a series of short outflows running from the beaches into the Mediterranean Sea and into the fresh water of Lake Maryut. Over half of the waste water came from industrial sources, creating serious problems of heavy metal pollution and causing contamination of fish. Infections related to untreated sewage were common. One consultancy report referred euphemistically to "identifiable floatables" - raw faeces visible in the sea water. While this affected both rich and poor sea bathers, the poor were worse affected as they could not escape to less polluted private beaches outside the city and had no alternative source of bathing water. Air pollution from the government owned asbestos plant was a further major health hazard for residents of the surrounding poor neighbourhood.*


Hardoy, Cairncross and Satterthwaite estimate that at least 600 million of the urban residents of the Third World live in what might be termed life and death threatening homes and neighbourhoods.[47] Risks include typhoid, diarrhoeal diseases, cholera, and intestinal worms from contaminated water and food; diseases associated with poor drainage and garbage collection such as malaria; disease vectors associated with overcrowded, poor quality housing and insufficient water for domestic hygiene such as lice, fleas, scabies, rats and cockroaches; tuberculosis, influenza and meningitis, associated with overcrowding and poor ventilation; high lead blood levels which retard children's mental development; respiratory infections related to poor ventilation and open fires; landslides, flooding and earthquake damage on marginal sites; injury in fire and domestic accidents - particularly affecting children who have no safe play areas; and lack of mobility for disabled people in overcrowded neighbourhoods with poor accessibility.[48,49,50]

The quality of environment has been deteriorating in many Third World cities during the last decade. For example, trend data for Chawama, Lusaka for the period 1978-88 show that the proportion of the population with access to piped water has declined from 99 percent to 83 per cent, while the proportion

46. See reference 43.

47. Hardoy, Jorge E., Sandy Cairncross and David Satterthwaite (editors) (1990), The Poor Die Young: Housing and Health in Third World Cities, Earthscan, London.

48. See reference 32.


52. In Tanzania, economic crisis has increased the incentive for city residents to engage in subsistence agriculture. During the 1980s real urban wages fell sharply: the minimum wage earner was able to buy only 1.3 kilogrammes of maize flour with a day’s wages in 1990 compared with 2.9 kilogrammes in 1989 and 8 kilogrammes in 1982-84. In Dar-es-Salaam, a study by Lugalla (Lugalla, Joe L.P. (1989), “The state, law and urban poverty in Tanzania” in Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America Vol.22, No.2, pages 131-157) found that 85 per cent of households were cultivating land, 17 per cent raised poultry and 17 per cent kept dairy cattle (quoted in Wratten, Ellen (1993), “Poverty in Tanzania”, report prepared for the Overseas Development Administration, London, February). Extensive urban agriculture has been documented in China, India, Kenya, Mexico and Taiwan (Freeman, D.B. (1991), City of Farmers, McGill/Queens University Press, Montreal, Smit, J. and J. Nasr (1992), “Urban agriculture for sustainable cities: using wastes and idle land and water bodies as resources”, Environment and Urbanization Vol.4, No.2, pages 141-52; Hardoy, Millin and Satterthwaite (1992), see reference 43.)


54. See reference 41.


with collected rubbish has dropped by two-thirds, from 11 per cent to just 4 per cent.\(^{51}\) At the household level, this has increased the amount of time women and children must spend fetching water daily.

2. Vulnerability Arising from Commercial Exchange: in general, cities are characterized by a greater degree of commercialization, than rural areas: production tends to be more highly specialized and people are reliant on market exchange to buy basic goods and services, and to earn money. Obviously, subsistence production (including agriculture) and unpaid productive and domestic work do exist in cities\(^ {52}\), and commoditization is also a feature of rural areas in many parts of the world.\(^ {53}\) Nevertheless, commercial exchange is more ubiquitous in the urban context. It affects all three aspects of the “trinity of deprivation” identified by Mangen as crucial determinants of poverty in European inner city areas: the local economy, housing, and education.\(^ {54}\)

Urban households require money in order to buy basic items such as water, food, and rent which might be free (or at least cheaper) in rural areas, and to pay for goods and services which might not be available in rural areas but are normally consumed in the city (such as electricity and hospital fees). This increases pressure to earn a money income. Like landless rural labourers, the main asset the urban poor can sell in order to command income is their own labour, and the choice of work open to them is constrained by a lack of formal educational qualifications. With limited choice, the experience of employment in the urban context "...is often not a form of independent existence at all, but an outcome of a comprehensive dependency relationship with an employer who is also a social superior."\(^ {55}\)

Those without savings or saleable capital assets are extremely vulnerable to changes in the demand for labour and the price of basic goods. Low-grade formal sector jobs are increasingly insecure, due to sub-contracting and accompanying casualization.\(^ {56}\) In African cities, retrenchment of low-grade civil service jobs and public sector wage freezes have occurred at the same time as removal of government subsidies on food and the introduction of user charges for education and health services. Consequently, there has been an expansion in working hours, particularly among women in the unregulated informal sector.\(^ {57}\) Earnings in the urban informal sector are typically irregular and often low. Research has shown that illness induced loss of employment is disproportionately borne by the poorest households and, in the absence of sickness insurance, represents a major risk to the ability to command resources.\(^ {58,59,60,61}\) Unemployment is another important source of vulnerability: even a few days without work can represent a serious financial blow.

The commoditization of housing is now widespread in cities and even small towns in certain Third World countries.\(^ {62,63,64,65}\) Between one-third and two-thirds of the residents of cities in the South are housed in sub-standard or illegal accommodation. In the 1960s, low-income urban residents built their own housing on vacant land but in 1990s their children are increas-


62. See reference 33.


64. See reference 51.


66. See reference 51.

67. Moser, Caroline O.N. (1989), "The impact of recession and adjustment policies at the micro-level: low-income women and their households in Guayaquil, ingly renting accommodation within the same squatter settlements. Due to intense competition for land, real rents tend to rise sharply in rapidly-growing cities. Renting creates an additional set of dependency relationships between tenant and landlord, particularly where rooms in a house are sub-let by an owner-occupier. In many cities, the poor are vulnerable to eviction at short notice, with possible loss of their possessions. In Nairobi, for example, fires have been used to clear rented housing in central squatter areas, in order to allow redevelopment of commercially valuable land. The decline in homeownership from 60 per cent to 37 per cent in Chawama, Lusaka over the period 1978-92 reduces the chances for the poor to hold an appreciating asset, and increases urban vulnerability.

Education is a major item of household expenditure for urban households in many countries. In the Third World, economic crisis has led to increased user charges for school fees, books and uniforms. Evidence from Ecuador suggests that the simultaneous intensification of women's work, resulting from cuts in real urban wages and community services, has led to girls being taken out of school in order to look after their younger siblings, thus reducing the chances of the next generation to escape poverty.

A number of authors have contended that the instability associated with the commoditization process reinforces inequality. Adelman and Morris, in a comparative review of poverty in the mid-nineteenth century, suggest that commercialization tends to increase poverty among the poorest members of the population. If commercialization is concentrated within cities, this may lead to a greater widening of intra-urban income differentials.

3. Social Diversity, Fragmentation and Crime: cities are heterogeneous "melting pots". They attract rural migrants and refugees with different ethnic, cultural and linguistic origins. Poor urban neighbourhoods contain a diversity of household types. The proportion of female headed households is often higher than in surrounding rural areas: in Latin America there are greater opportunities for women's work in cities, while in parts of Africa customary law excludes women from owning rural land in their own right, and the city offers a means for their independent survival after marital separation. Due to the socially constructed gender division of labour and high dependency ratios, these households tend to have fewer income-earning opportunities and are generally poorer than male headed and jointly headed households (though not all female headed households are poor). Typically, women have lower levels of education (a rational response by poor families wishing to maximize earnings is to send sons rather than daughters to school), long working hours (including domestic work such as water collection and fuel-gathering), responsibility for child care as well as productive and community management roles, poorer diets and more restricted physical mobility than men. The growing phenomenon of urban "street" children - either unaccompanied by adults or, more commonly, living with their families at night and working on the streets by day - is also strongly asso-


77. Friedmann, J. (1989), "The Latin American barrio movement as a social movement:

Social diversity is likely to create new tensions and survival strategies. Relationships in the urban context may be more impersonal. Lifestyles, kinship, and neighbourhood support networks are different from those in rural areas, though links with a rural extended family can remain an important part of an urban household's survival strategy. In Latin America, urban social movements, based on the recognition of collective class interests, are important means by which the poor lobby for land rights and infrastructure. Community based organizations also provide a means of saving and arranging income-earning opportunities.

The extent of relative poverty is at its most conspicuous where the rich and the poor live side by side. Cities contain wealthy, poor and in-between neighbourhoods, often in close proximity. A single bus journey in Nairobi can take one from the shanty of Mathare Valley, through the modern city centre, to lush, tree-lined roads and the irrigated lawns of guarded mansions. The temptation and opportunities for crime may be greater in cities but the poor rather than the well-off are most often the victims. Fear of personal safety - real or imagined - restricts mobility after nightfall in low-income areas.

The vandalism of community infrastructure by alienated youth is costly to the poor and leads to scarce resources being spent on measures to improve security. For example, in Lusaka, parent-teacher associations raised funds to build perimeter walls around school grounds rather than spend the money on books and equipment. Drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS, domestic violence, female depression and family breakdown, while not exclusive to urban areas, have all been associated with urban poverty.

**4. Vulnerability Arising from the Intervention of the State and Police:** finally, the urban poor are likely to have more contact with state agents and the police than their rural counterparts. While government policies have an important positive impact on poverty alleviation, many poor people experience the state in negative ways - as an oppressive bureaucracy which attempts to regulate their activities without understanding their needs, or as corrupt policemen, demanding money in order to turn a blind eye to illicit income-generating activities such as brewing or prostitution - rather than as servants of the public. Policing in poor areas is particularly problematic when it is associated with racial antagonism and has provoked riots in inner city areas in the USA, France and Britain in recent years.

Rakodi asserts that "...planners have little understanding about how the poor survive." As a result, urban plans and policies generally have little relevance to the situation which the poor face and may well make it far worse." One way this can impact badly on the poor is where a rigid constraint is placed on the supply of serviced land and housing. Residents of squatter settlements live in terror of official clearances in which they may lose their few capital assets and personal possessions. In Brazil, where the state pursued a policy of eradicating favelas (squatter settlements) in the 1960s and 1970s, Portes comments that subsequent government neglect was "not an unwelcome

78. See reference 51.


81. See reference 56.


Lee-Smith argues that it is in the interests of the ruling elite to continue to prevent easy access to land by the urban poor because control of land provides a source of cash income and political support. This is likely to reinforce the official ideology of maintaining high building standards and ensuring that petty commodity production, including building, remains in the informal sector.

Castells argues that the state plays a central role in mediating class interests in urban areas by subsidizing the cost of reproducing labour. Where governments have intervened in favour of the poor, the withdrawal of this assistance may be devastating. The removal of state subsidies on basic foodstuffs has greatly increased the vulnerability of the urban poor in Africa, causing rapid price rises and falling real incomes. In Zambia, for example, the majority of low-income households in Lusaka changed their diets following government auctioning of foreign exchange from 1985, substituting mealie-meal for protein, while the poorest cut down their consumption of mealie-meal. Extensive rioting broke out in the Copperbelt towns in December 1986 following an attempted doubling of the price of mealie-meal by the government. As a result of devaluation and removal of price controls, the official price of mealie-meal increased seven-fold between 1985 and 1989. The price has continued to spiral steeply since 1989, trebling in 1992-93.

The importance of these four, interlinked features of urban poverty - environmental and health risks, vulnerability arising from commoditization, social fragmentation and crime, and negative contact with the state and police - is not that they are only found in the poor parts of towns and cities. None of them are associated exclusively with the urban sector: they may be found to some degree in rural areas, and not every town will exhibit all the features. However, it is significant that in poor neighbourhoods in the city these characteristics may be uniquely combined in ways that intensify the insecurity and life-threatening health risks experienced with poverty, and influence the coping strategies adopted by the poor at the household and community levels.

The effects of poverty at the urban level are therefore likely to be different even if the basic underlying causes are common.

Is there a conceptual difference between urban and rural poverty? Urban poverty, as experienced in New York ghettos or Nairobi’s squatter settlements, certainly feels qualitatively different. Yet, location within the city is not a sufficient predictor of poverty:

“Inner city and marginalization are not coterminous. Mere location within the core does not marginalize, since not all the heterogeneity of communities housed there conforms to this label, neither are political responses to them uniform since plainly some are regarded as the deserving poor. There have to be other factors attached to individuals and groups for the marginalization process to congeal.”

The social constructs of race, class, gender and age affect poverty in both urban and rural contexts, as do national and
international policies, and external shocks. It is also important to remember that a key distinguishing feature of rural poverty - accessibility - can also be a problem for people living in poor urban communities. Whilst there may be a greater volume and quality of community services in cities, the urban poor are invariably denied access to them: isolation is determined by political clout as well as spatial location.

To get a complete picture of poverty, we need methods of analysis which examine these similar features as well as the differences. Rural and urban human settlements are linked economic and social systems, and it is unhelpful to restrict our vision to only one part of the system or to use poverty data to set one arbitrarily defined part against another.

VII. WHY ARE THE POOR POOR? ALTERNATIVE PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR POLICY IMPLICATIONS

THE ANALYSIS OF poverty has been dominated by two broadly opposed perspectives, each of which leads to an alternative set of policy prescriptions. On the one hand, poverty is attributed to the personal failings of the individuals concerned which leads to self-perpetuating cycles of social pathology. On the other hand, it is viewed as the inevitable outcome of an unfairly structured political and economic system which discriminates against disadvantaged groups. The former perspective is intellectually rooted in laissez-faire individualism and the legitimation of racial discrimination. It tends to lead to free-market economic policies coupled with residual social policies which focus on the psychological rehabilitation of the poor. The alternative radical view draws from Marxist theory and is closely associated with the developmentalist or basic needs tradition. Policy prescriptions involve a more interventionist role for the state in promoting equity, analysis of poverty as asocial construct rather than an individual problem, and the redistribution of assets and decision-making power at international, national, regional, community, household and intra-household levels.

a. Developing Societies

In the Third World country literature (much of which has been written by northern researchers), these two views are typified by the “culture of poverty” thesis of Oscar Lewis, in which the poor are assumed to be marginal to urban development due to innate and culturally determined personal characteristics and resulting deviant behaviour; and the alternative “marginalization” thesis, which ascribes a more positive role to the activities of poor urban communities and emphasizes the structural barriers which exclude their participation in formal economic, political and social institutions.

Oscar Lewis’s anthropological studies of poor families in Mexico City and San Juan, Puerto Rico led him to the conclusion that those trapped in poverty had characteristically different behav-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEANING OF URBAN POVERTY</th>
<th>IMPLICATIONS FOR MEASUREMENT</th>
<th>IMPLICATIONS FOR URBAN POVERTY PROGRAMMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conventional economic definition: poverty is a lack of income (or consumption), defined in absolute or relative terms.</td>
<td>Quantitative approach, using a common, scale of measurement (usually a poverty line based on household budget surveys); measurement of the extent of poverty (number affected) and the depth of poverty (how far incomes are below the poverty line).</td>
<td>Focus on redistribution at the macro-level. Increase urban productivity and incomes through job creation; deal with residual poverty through transfer payments, social safety nets, subsidies on basic items.</td>
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<td>Participatory social development definition: poverty is multifaceted and its definition varies between individuals.</td>
<td>Qualitative analysis of the processes underlying poverty and the ways in which poverty affects different subgroups among &quot;the poor&quot; (such as young and old people, women and men, different household types, castes and ethnic groups). Uses a range of &quot;bottom-up&quot; participatory methods such as focus groups, life histories, wealth ranking and mapping to examine people's perceptions of poverty, vulnerability, and intra-household and community level entitlements.</td>
<td>Focus on micro-level support to enable individuals to participate socially and economically and strengthen their ability to stay out of poverty. May include community level interventions to strengthen health, education, communications, credit for small enterprises, people's capacity to make decisions affecting their own lives, political participation, and legal literacy; decentralization of decision making to local levels (the poor know best how to use resources in their own neighbourhoods); and the differentiation of special needs of particular groups among &quot;the poor&quot;.</td>
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<td>Integrated development approach: causes of poverty are interlinked (environment, housing, health, income generation, education etc) and must be tackled in a coordinated way.</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative assessments are complementary. Quantification includes social indicators such as life expectancy, incidence of disease, education levels, as well as income and expenditure. Need to understand the spatial distribution of poverty at the city-wide level, in order to target resources at the poorest groups; within poor areas, need to understand priorities of different sub-groups.</td>
<td>Holistic, integrated approach to urban development and poverty alleviation - redistribute resources to provide for basic needs of the poor, coordinating interventions in primary health care, water and sanitation, pollution control, housing, income generation, education, crime control, domestic violence, leisure facilities. Acknowledge linkages between national economic and social policies and poverty in urban and rural areas.</td>
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purer patterns and values from the dominant society and culture. He argued that:

"The culture of poverty is both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalist society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society." (96)

The hypothesis of the separate "sub-culture" was used to explain the perpetuation of their poverty from generation to generation. Children born into poor families grew up with a weak family structure, ineffective interpersonal relations, a present time orientation and unrestrained spending patterns. This environment engendered values such as helplessness, dependence, a sense of inferiority, resignation and fatalism. Such children would be less interested in education, the value of work or self-improvement. They would have a low ability to plan ahead or to identify and react to changing opportunities.

These adaptive responses to economic deprivation and social marginality would, in turn, make the disadvantaged position of the poor yet more entrenched. Characteristics such as male machismo, sexual promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, illegitimacy and female headed households, a rigid division of family responsibilities between men and women, alcohol and drug abuse, and poor educational performance serve as "own goals", preventing the poor from rising out of their situation and precluding economic, social and political integration into the mainstream culture. (97)

Lewis further claimed that the basic attitudes and values of the debilitating sub-culture are absorbed "...by the time slum children are age six or seven", thus ensuring that the traits causing poverty are passed on to the next generation. (98) Appropriate remedies would include removing children from their home environment in order to rehabilitate them and encourage a change in their values.

Lewis' work has provoked widespread debate and criticism. Concern has been expressed with the research methods used, the lack of representativeness of the families studied, and the ethnocentricity with which Lewis judged other people's lives. Valentine argued strongly that the lifestyle of the poor is not based on deviant values but is instead a rational response to having insufficient money. (99) Perlman's classic study of urban poverty in Rio de Janeiro provided empirical evidence to challenge Lewis' stereotype. (100) Far from being marginal to urban development, the poor made an important contribution to the city's informal economy. They did not have the attitudes and behaviours supposedly associated with marginal groups, were socially well organized and cohesive, culturally optimistic, aspired to improve their houses and their children's education, and were neither politically apathetic nor radical. Poverty resulted from discriminatory structures which denied the non-
privileged the means to realize their aspirations. Moser and Satterthwalte reinforced this view. They pointed out that although squatter settlements are built in peripheral areas, where there is less competition for land from high-income groups, squatters are usually established urban residents who are well integrated into the city economy. In fact, squatter settlements are highly heterogeneous and contain middle-income as well as low-income residents.

The dispute over the validity of the culture of poverty hypothesis, and the shift towards a structural explanation of poverty, reflects wider shifts in development thinking. In the 1970s, modernization theory - which prescribed a blueprint development strategy based on rapid economic growth and accorded a residual role for social policy - was challenged by dependency theorists who claimed that urban and rural poverty in the Third World was intrinsically linked to the process of capital accumulation in the North, and by proponents of basic needs strategies who called for a redefinition of the goals of development to emphasize equity and democracy as well as growth.

In the 1980s, the growth models re-emerged in new forms, with pressure from the World Bank and bilateral development agencies for macro-economic reforms which would facilitate private sector development. This approach is mirrored by the World Bank's latest policy paper for the urban sector which attributes the causes of urban poverty largely to "structural constraints and inefficiencies in the urban economy including excessive protection of capital-intensive industry, ineffective public policies and weak public institutions", and argues that "poverty reduction is possible in part through improving productivity at the individual, household, firm, and urban levels." The previous emphasis on housing and infrastructure projects (outlined by the World Bank Task Force on Poverty) has given way to interventions designed to strengthen city-wide economic management, deregulation of the private sector, increased social sector expenditure for human resource development of the urban poor by providing basic services in education, health, nutrition, family planning and vocational training, and support for the voluntary sector.

There is now widespread recognition that structural adjustment programmes have exacerbated poverty, particularly among lower middle-class and low-income groups in cities. In 1987, UNICEF called for greater targeting of public expenditure to benefit the poorest groups, and compensatory measures to lessen the impact on their health and productivity. These measures included public works employment schemes and nutrition interventions such as selective food subsidies and direct feeding for the most vulnerable. However, UNICEF have since expressed concern that adjustment programmes need to focus on the structural aspects of poverty:

"...restructuring the economy in order to reach a reasonable growth path should not be the only major objective of adjustment programmes but also a speedy elimination of
structural poverty...compensatory programmes and the establishment of the safety nets which often accompany structural adjustment programmes can... in high income countries - contribute to reducing poverty. In general, however, these programmes do not...attack the root causes of structural poverty."

Safety nets (including food for work schemes and transfer payments to those below the poverty line) are unlikely to be an effective or sustainable solution to urban poverty in the poorest countries where a majority of the population are living below the subsistence income level. In Zambia, for example, where 80 per cent of the national population and 40 per cent of the urban population fall beneath the official poverty line, food for work projects in Lusaka's squatter compounds have benefitted as few as 5 per cent of eligible households, and their continuation is dependent on foreign food aid.

The structural approach to poverty demands more radical redistributive measures (such as land and tax reform, changes in the legal rights of women, and the coordinated provision of infrastructure and basic services to all parts of the city) in order to increase the resources of the poor and improve their long-term ability to earn a decent livelihood, and increased popular participation in decision-making. It also stresses the links between poverty in Third World cities and unequal global trading relationships, requiring change in the international economic order (particularly a moratorium on debt repayments and the curbing of multinational corporate power).

In an interesting work bridging the analysis of poverty in the North and the South, Townsend proposes a structural theory of poverty based on three elements: the economic and social influence of global institutions and transnational corporations; analysis of the ways in which human needs are socially created - by the state in defining the rights and obligations of "citizenship", and by other sub-national associations such as communities, families and commercial organizations; and by gender preference, which is "a prime determinant of the construction of society and hence of unequal privilege and the unequal distribution of income and other resources in society." The policy implications of this theory are a restructurings of world trade and international action to regulate and change the pattern of ownership of transnational corporations; a more positive approach to social planning with the coordination of social and economic policies, and a creative or preventative role for social policy rather than a casualty treatment role; a fairer distribution of wealth (rather than emphasis on social security transfer income) and withdrawal of the right to inherit vast wealth; the introduction of maximum as well as minimum wages and extension of wages to women in unpaid work; and the enlargement of the rights of citizens to participate in community institutions.

b. Industrial Societies

The idea that the poor are to blame for their poverty is a re-
current theme in social policy in the North. In Britain it is enshrined in the concept of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor which is used to justify the differential treatment of those deemed to have brought their condition on themselves through socially irresponsible behaviour (such as teenage girls who have become pregnant "just so as to qualify for social housing")[115] and innocent, "decent" and hard-working citizens who have fallen on hard times (such as widows with young children). This view is mirrored by Jenks, writing about poverty in the USA: "A growing fraction of the population is poor because they have violated rules that most Americans regard as reasonable."[116]

The culture of poverty was debated extensively in the USA and UK in the 1960s and 1970s but in the 1980s and 1990s discussion has shifted to the notion of "underclass". This concept parallels the culture of poverty but is narrower in focus. It is applied to those trapped in the geographic and social isolation of the ghetto rather than to the majority of the "deserving" or "respectable" poor.

According to Wilson, there are three aspects to the creation of a ghetto underclass: concentration, social isolation and spatial mismatch.[117] Urban poverty in the USA has become increasingly concentrated among ethnic minorities in the poorest neighbourhoods of major cities. Of the 2.4 million ghetto poor, 65 per cent are black and 22 per cent are Hispanic.[118] As middle-class families have moved out of the inner city, a distinct local social milieu has been created where teenage pregnancies, school drop-outs, crime, violence and welfare dependency are normal behaviour rather than a disgrace. Simultaneously, industrial transformation has resulted in job losses in inner city areas, leaving the urban underclass with few opportunities. The physical isolation of the ghetto poor has been reinforced by highway and housing projects which have segregated the black population and isolated them from employment outside the inner city.

Thus, the underclass hypothesis emphasizes that marginalization is the outcome of an interaction between personal and group cultural characteristics and a complex web of demographic and economic changes, and government policy which combine to create a poverty trap for ghetto residents.[119] The poor are both the victims of the system which binds them in the ghetto and a cause - through the criminal and anti-social activities that some of them are alleged to engage in - of the deteriorating quality of life in their neighbourhoods.

The concepts of universal basic needs and social exclusion have also been important in framing alternative approaches to poverty in the twentieth century. Neo-Keynesian analysis views the problem as one of cyclical macro-economic demand management, and stresses job creation through reflation of the economy and training of the unemployed. In Britain, nationalization of industry, greater state control of employment, regional assistance,[120] the strengthening of the town and country planning system and nationalization of the right to develop land, the opening of universal access to education and health services, and legislation to diminish racial and gender discrimination between 1945 and 1979 fitted with a structural understanding

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115. A view epitomized in the speech by Peter Lilley, Secretary of State for Social Security, to the British Conservative Party Conference in October 1993.


119. See reference 117.

120. Regional policy has had mixed results. Doreen Massey's research suggests that changes in the local gender division of labour was more important than government incentives in attracting new industries to the assisted regions: following male redundancy, women no longer had to provide round-the-clock domestic services for husbands and sons on shiftwork and therefore became freer to take up paid employment themselves (LSE Gender Institute public lecture, 1992).
of the causes of poverty. However, this was mixed with subsistence level, means tested social security benefits which echo the idea that the long-term unemployed should not enjoy the same entitlement to income as those in work.

In continental Europe, unemployment benefits are set at a more generous level based on average wages and reflecting the concept of equal citizenship. The French second generation national assistance scheme (the revenu minimum d'insertion) and its counterpart programme operating in many of the Spanish regions attempts permanent rehabilitation of the poor through job retraining. Mangen found the underclass concept was not applied widely to inner city areas in mainland Europe.\(^{121}\)

While interpretations of poverty varied between the European countries studied, the central notion was found to be "social exclusion superimposed on material and cultural deprivation". For example van Parijs distinguishes between "outsiders" who are permanently excluded from a job, wage and welfare benefits including future pension rights, and "insiders" who have secure jobs. European policy responses typically include employment, training, and education programmes coupled with physical regeneration strategies for deprived inner city areas and "problem" housing estates, which aim to remove marginalized people permanently from poverty and "reinsert" them into society.

In contrast, the current emphasis of employment policy in Britain and the USA reflects a concern with the welfare-dependency of the poor, with short-term "work experience" being offered rather than training schemes which lead to permanent jobs and van Parijs' "insider" benefits. "Workfare" schemes have been introduced in the USA under the Family Support Act 1988, where welfare-dependent mothers are required to undertake low-paid community service work rather than receive benefits. Wilson has proposed universal child care to allow poor working parents access to education, training and employment.\(^{122}\) Again, state child care provision is far more extensive in continental Europe than in either the UK or USA, where private provision is the main form.

Urban poverty alleviation strategies are different in South and North, not only because state resources vary but also because the conceptualization of urban poverty differs. In the North, where urban poverty is not generally treated as a separate category, the emphasis of policy has been on national and regional interventions, with selective assistance at intra-city level to targeted deprived areas or groups. In the South, where urban poverty has been neglected until recently, policies have focused on raising incomes and improving access to services in the rural sector. Given the interrelated determinants of urban and rural poverty, what is required is an integrated approach which simultaneously addresses ways of increasing the opportunities and reducing the inequalities of people in both sectors. As Stren states, writing about the urban crisis in Africa:

"It is not a question of determining whether the rural sector or the urban sector is the most important; an understand-
ing of their symbiotic relationship is required... One cannot let the urban system crumble to the point that it cannot support rural development, while channelling all available funds into the rural sector... (p.2)

(But nevertheless) It is now widely appreciated that rural conditions are even worse than urban conditions, and this is the root cause of the urban management problem. (p.305)

The magnitude of poverty is such that its solution is unlikely to involve any one agency acting alone. But governments do have the responsibility, jointly and severally, of setting a policy context within which discriminatory social and economic structures are removed. Moreover, urban policy must be defined less narrowly than a preoccupation with the provision of infrastructure or economic management to raise productivity, and give equal emphasis to social and political structures which influence people's well-being and the ways in which they are affected by adversity.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS: THE LINKAGE BETWEEN DEFINITIONS, POLICY AND THE MEASUREMENT OF URBAN POVERTY

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE nature of poverty, and the policy responses which follow from these perceptions, are central in deciding how best to study, measure and analyze the phenomenon. Different kinds of information are demanded by different approaches. For example, if poverty is understood as the product of a deviant sub-culture, then priority might be given to identifying and collecting information about behavioral problems such as family instability, alcoholism and drug abuse. Alternatively, if anti-poverty policies are designed to deal with structural causes, information would be required about not only access to employment, housing and educational opportunities at the city level but also social and institutional structures which discriminate against the poor at international and national levels.

The first section of this paper identified two principal ways in which poverty has been defined: conventional definitions which use income or other social indicators as a proxy for welfare, and participatory definitions which allow for flexibility in local perceptions of poverty and view it in non-material as well as physical terms. The conventional approach lends itself to quantitative measurement and allows individuals or households to be ranked along a common, externally defined scale which serves as a surrogate measure of poverty. This is useful in so far as it is necessary to understand general patterns of deprivation and to compare different groups or countries in order to target resources in the most effective way. Comparative measurement is essential in designing and monitoring redistributive policies and social safety nets.

However, if we accept that poverty is an inherently subjective concept, then such measurements can only give us an accurate...
picture of its incidence if everyone holds an identical view of what poverty is - which, as we have shown, they do not. The contribution of the anthropological approaches to poverty measurement is that they recognize the diversity of perceptions of poverty and enable us to build up an understanding of its many dimensions for particular poor groups. This type of analysis is extremely important in designing "enabling" strategies which help to overcome the structural constraints to economic, social and political participation by the poor. In order to "help the poor to help themselves" - the mainstream of current anti-poverty thinking in the Third World and an idea which is superseding the welfare state approach in some Northern countries - we need to understand the nature of entitlements and vulnerability at a disaggregated level.

Recent work in developing participatory rural research in the South has much to offer the analysis of poverty in the urban context in both South and North. The use of multiple measures to observe any phenomenon, including poverty, is in theory superior to the use of just one or two measures. Yet, there are drawbacks. Participatory analysis requires greater time input (from ordinary people as well as professionals) and, while it can further the objective of involving the poor in decision-making, it is by nature a highly localized exercise and tends to lead to micro-level solutions rather than challenge the broader national and international structures which shape poverty.

Statistics about the incidence of "urban poverty" and "rural poverty" are frequently used as ammunition to capture resources by those on either side of the urban-rural divide. This paper has challenged the usefulness of treating urban poverty as a separate conceptual category. Any such classification is intrinsically arbitrary. More importantly, from a structural perspective, the determinants of urban and rural poverty are interlinked and have to be tackled in tandem.

Within cities, certain of the problems associated with poverty - poor environmental conditions, vulnerability arising from commercialization, social stress and conflict with state authority - occur in unique combination and defy solution by vertical sectoral interventions. An integrated strategy, which aims to deal with social, economic, political and environmental problems in a coordinated way, offers more hope. The integrated development approach requires both quantitative poverty indicators - to "best guess" the distribution and depth of deprivation within cities and countries - and qualitative analysis of social structures and the process by which poverty affects different groups. As a tool to guide the planning and monitoring of policy, both quantitative and qualitative approaches to measurement therefore have a place. Neither is sufficient alone.