

Poverty: What is it and what is it not? A Concept Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: There is no single “correct” definition of poverty. However, there is consensus that any definition of poverty needs to acknowledge particular social, economic and cultural contexts. Different meanings of poverty results in different policy implementations in the context of human poverty. There is also less agreement as to whether objective or subjective definitions and measurements of poverty are more valid. Participatory approaches however point to the need to let people define for themselves what it means to be poor and define the magnitude, causes and consequences of being poor. The major focus of this paper was to clarify, explain and define the concept of poverty.

Methods: A concept analysis of poverty was done using the eight steps of Walker and Avant’s strategic method. Initially 20 articles from 1995-2017 were reviewed. Seven articles were later dropped and thirteen articles were finally reviewed to deduce the definition of poverty.

Results: The main antecedents of poverty identified in literature include ignorance, laziness, and lack of skill, lack of capital, dependency, poor infrastructure, unemployment, dishonesty and presence of diseases. Attributes of poverty identified in literature include lack of adequate income, ill-being, and lack of capability and functioning, lack of assets and material things, vulnerability, lack of education, social exclusion, and deprivation, powerless and voiceless. The resultant consequences of poverty were severe diseases, hunger, malnutrition, increased morbidity and mortality from illness, school dropping out, social discrimination, corruption, abuse and lack of general services. Empirical referents which are fundamental to poverty for future health and poverty research methodology in poverty eradication include Human Development Index (HDI) and Human Poverty Index(HPI). These indices are helpful in mapping poverty differences between countries and view poverty trends over time.

Conclusion: The definition of poverty provided in this concept analysis will facilitate proper interpretation of the meaning of poverty and standardization of tools used to measure and monitor poverty. Poverty eradication purports to positively affect the economic growth of nations and hence improve the well-being of individuals.

Key words: concept analysis, poverty, Walker and Avant.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty reduction and eradication has been unanimously endorsed by the international community as the overarching

goal of development (UN, 1995). At different summit gatherings, regional and global occasions, world leaders have categorically stated and reconfirmed an

agreement that poverty must be reduced and finally eradicated (UNDP, 2006). In September 2015 the Heads of States and Government and High Representatives at the UN Headquarters agreed to end poverty everywhere by 2030 (UN, 2015). However, this target's meaning is obscured by the bewildering ambiguity with which the word poverty is defined, used and measured by many different indicators proposed to measure and monitor poverty. There appears less agreement on what poverty is and how it can be measured (UN, 2012). Different meanings of poverty and different ways of measuring poverty leads to different ways to tackle it. Therefore the authors of this article argue that poverty is a highly contested concept.

What is taken to mean poverty depends on who asks the question, how it is understood and who answers (Chambers, 2006). Common definitions of poverty have been constructed mainly by authors and reflect their powers to make definitions according to their perceptions-but whose reality counts? (Chambers, 2006). Is it the author's reality of definitions that counts as they construct the definitions of poverty with their mind-sets and for their purposes or is it the definitions according to the poor as they enable to analyse and express poverty? Whose definition counts? No matter who defines poverty, it is critical to define it to be understood, at least in part, in relation to particular social, economic, cultural and multidimensional contexts.

Analysis of the concept of poverty will help to close the gap between its varied definitions. This will provide a mutual understanding between the meaning of poverty and its measurement. Regardless of the different meanings of poverty, there tends to be a common goal which is to reduce it and eventually eradicate it (UN, 2015). In order to reduce or eradicate poverty political commitment is needed and genuine facts in addressing poverty eradication are needed. Analysts, economists, policy makers, politicians and practitioners need appropriate and dedicated

measures of poverty to enable progress from rhetoric and general political statements to action and results on the ground (UNDP, 2006).

Significance and uses of the concept

The concept of poverty is frequently used and discussed at national, political and organizational meetings. It is discussed in the field of economics, health economics, social sciences and political fields (Spiker, 1999). Poverty is a public policy concern at community, national and global level and its eradication is considered one of the Sustainable Goals of Development (SDGs) (Fukuda-Parr, 2006). Poverty is primarily accorded first preference by lenders and donors to all the SDGs, of which the reduction of extreme poverty is the first and usually considered the prime goal of development (UN, 2015). The concept of poverty is analyzed in political and academic circles in order to keep the poor on agenda, to be able to identify the poor if one is to be able to target interventions that aim to reduce poverty, to monitor and evaluate projects that focus on the poor and to evaluate effectiveness of institutions whose goal is to assist those living with poverty (Poverty Manual, 2005).

METHODS

Walker and Avant's strategic eight step method of concept analysis was used in analyzing the concept of poverty. The method focuses on justified and explained attributes of a concept (Walker & Avant, 2005). These steps include concept selection, determining the purpose of analysis (clarification, developing operational definition and distinguish concept from ordinary language), identifying uses of the concept, determining the attributes or characteristics of the concept, identifying the antecedents of the concept, identifying the consequences of the concept, constructing a model case and defining the empirical referents of the concept (Walker & Avant, 2005).

A search of literature was conducted to review the different definitions of

poverty. Literature was sought from dictionaries and Google Scholar. The words poverty and concept analysis were used in search for relevant literature. Articles from 1995-2017 were reviewed. We have gone back to review papers as far back as 1995 in order to capture the meanings of poverty in the past two decades as defined by major donor organizations such as UN (United Nations) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). The papers that were selected were English language, economics, health economics, political sciences and social sciences. Initially twenty articles were selected and later screened by their relevance to thirteen. Seven articles were later dropped because they were focusing on inequality and injustice rather than poverty.

RESULTS

Definitions

Although poverty is a universal concept, its definition is often contested (Spiker, 1999). The concept “poverty” is considered to have a cluster of different overlapping meanings depending on the subject area of discourse (Chambers, 2006, Spicker, 1999). According to the Oxford Business Dictionary (2016) poverty is a condition where peoples’ basic needs for food, shelter and clothing are not met. It puts poverty in 2 types of absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is synonymous with destitution and occurs when people cannot obtain adequate resources to support a minimum level of physical health (Oxford Business Dictionary, 2016). Absolute poverty can be eradicated as demonstrated by other countries (World Bank, 2005). Relative poverty occurs when people do not enjoy a certain minimum level of living standards as determined by the government that differ from nation to nation, or sometimes within the same nation (Oxford Business Dictionary, 2016).

The World Bank defines poverty as pronounced deprivation in “well-being” (World Bank, 2000). Well-being focuses on

whether households or individuals have enough resources to meet their needs (World Bank, 2005), hence poverty is analyzed by comparing an individual’s income or consumption with some defined threshold below which they are considered to be poor (World Bank, 2005). The World Bank might answer that the poor are those living below US\$1/person/day (World Bank, 2005). This serves as the largest conventional view-poverty is largely viewed in monetary terms and is the most starting point for analysis of the definition of poverty (World Bank, 2005). The approach of well-being goes an extra mile to ask whether people are able to get a specific type of consumption of a good or a service such as food, shelter, health care, transport and education (Chambers, 2006). This view goes beyond the traditional monetary views of poverty to get nutritional poverty or educational poverty which might be measured by asking whether someone is illiterate.

The broadest approach to well-being and poverty is that one that has been articulated by Amartya Sen in 1987, who argues that well-being comes from a “capability” to function in a society (Sen, 2001). Sen argued that when people lack certain capabilities in the society they have poverty and have inadequate income, education, health, insecurity, low self-confidence, absence of rights such as freedom to of expression or speech (Sen, 2001). If taken in this view it clearly shows that the concept of poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, and less amenable to simple solutions. Take for instance even with higher than average incomes which may certainly reduce poverty, these may need to be accompanied by measures to empower the poor and address specific weakness patterns of deprivation, social circumstances, security and dependence. In the 1970s, Robert MacNamara presented a well celebrated speech to the World Bank of Governors in Nairobi with emphasis on relative deprivation, inspired by the work in UK by

Townsend and Runciman (Maxwell, 1999). Townsend helped a lot in redefining poverty not just as a failure to meet minimum nutrition or subsistence levels, but rather as a failure to keep up with the standards prevalent in a given society (Maxwell, 1999).

Other layers of the complexity to the definition of poverty were added in the 1990s due to the works of Robert Chambers who incorporated non-monetary aspects such as powerlessness and isolation (Chambers, 2006). Robert Chambers with the idea of well-being in mind acting as a metaphor for absence of poverty emphasize how poor people view their situation themselves (Chambers, 2006). At the same time the UNDP was inspired by the works of Sen and developed an idea of human development to lead a long healthy, creative life, freedom, dignity and self-esteem (UNDP, 2006). Robert Chambers outlines five clusters of meanings of poverty and also puts emphasis on the analysis and views of poor people themselves and their meanings of poverty (Chambers, 2006). According to Chambers (2006) when the poor people express their views, we get a case for changing language, concepts and measures of development. The five clusters of meanings of poverty according to Chambers are namely income poverty, material lack or want, capability deprivation, multidimensional view of deprivation and material lack or want (Chambers, 2006).

Paul Spicker argued that there are twelve clusters of meanings of poverty (Spicker, 1999). He went on to argue that in social sciences poverty is commonly understood in at least 12 discrete senses. Discrete in the sense that they can be logically separated, so that circumstances which apply in one sense do not necessarily apply in others (Spicker, 1999). The clusters of meanings of poverty according to Spicker are need, pattern of deprivation, limited resources, standard of living, inequality, economic position, social class, dependency, lack of basic security, lack of

entitlement and exclusion. Poverty then needs to be seen as a composite concept, embracing the range of meanings (Spicker, 1999).

The poor people's definitions of poverty can be covered in an inductive approach to uncover the dimensions of poverty that are important to the poor and to capture their characterization of poverty (Voice of the Poor (VOP), 2005). We need to set aside our prejudices and assumptions as authors about what is poverty and our conceptual frameworks for understanding poverty. There are five main findings about the meanings of poverty according to the voices from the poor (VOP, 2005). Firstly, many factors combine to make poverty a complex multidimensional concept (VOP, 2005). Secondly, the poor define poverty as lack of what is necessary for material well-being such as food, land, housing, motor cars and other assets (VOP, 2005). The third finding is that poor people's definitions of poverty reveal important psychological aspects of poverty. Poverty is viewed by the poor as lack of multiple resources leading to physical and psychological deprivation. It is very important to know that poor people are aware of their poverty and they know that they lack voice, power and independence which leads them to exploitation by the rich (VOP, 2005). Their poverty makes them vulnerable to rudeness, humiliation and inhumane treatment by agents of state and from people whom they seek help. Poor people also mention their feelings of pain brought about by unavoidable violation of social norms when defining poverty (VOP, 2005). The fourth finding is that poor people mention absence of basic infrastructure such as roads, schools and clinics (VOP, 2005). Lastly, the poor people focus on assets rather than income and link their lack of assets to their vulnerability and exposure to risks (VOP, 2005). The following clauses were obtained from different people who considered themselves poor:

"Don't ask me what poverty is because you have met it outside my house. Look at the house and count the number of holes. Look

at my utensils and the clothes that I am wearing. Look at everything and write what you see. What you see is poverty.” -A poor man, Kenya 1997

“It’s the cost of living, low salaries, and lack of jobs. And it’s also not having medicine, food and clothes.” -Brazil 1995

“Being poor is being always tired.” -Kenya 1996

“Poverty is lack of freedom, enslaved by crushing daily burden, by depression and fear of what the future will bring.” -Georgia 1997

After an extensive literature review the authors managed to define poverty as a complex multidimensional absence of well-being characterized by absolute or relative lack of income, basic resources, inability to participate in the activities that are encouraged or approved by the society, lack of freedom of expression and lack of power associated with social discrimination, exclusion and deprivation of human rights.

Defining attributes

Attributes according to Walker and Avant (2005) are those traits/characteristics of a concept that are closely linked with the concept and will assist in differentiating a particular concept from any other related concept. Attributes of poverty identified in literature include lack of adequate income, lack of capability and functioning, lack of basic needs, vulnerability, deprivation, lack of education and social exclusion (Spicker, 1999). Powerless and voiceless are other attributes identified in literature (Chambers, 2006).

Lack of income

The monetary approach to the identification of poverty is the most commonly used (Laderchi et al., 2003). Poverty is identified with a shortfall in consumption or income from some poverty line. The valuation of different components of income or consumption is done at market prices, which requires identification of relevant market and monetary values for those items that are mostly used (Laderchi et al., 2003).

Lack of capability

The capability approach focuses on indicators of freedom to live a valued life instead of a monetary life (Sen, 2001). Poverty is seen as failure to achieve certain minimal or basic capabilities that is the ability to satisfy adequately certain crucially important functioning (Sen, 2001).

Lack of basic needs and material assets

The material aspects of poverty are well known (Chambers, 2006). Hunger and food insecurity remain the core concerns (World Bank, 2005). For poor families, meeting their most basic needs for food, water, and shelter can be a daily struggle; this becomes acute when there is unemployment and underemployment, or lack of productive land or other income-earning assets.

Vulnerability

Degree of vulnerability emerged as an important characterization of poverty (Chambers, 2006). The poor people are not only distinguished between the rich and poor but the poor are categorized based on assets and degree of vulnerability (Voices of the poor, 2005). The poor are described as those who cannot feed their children properly; they live in poor houses, which they will pass onto their dependents; and they are unable to assist their dependents. At the other extreme they are the chronically hungry, variously described as the extremely poor, the perennially needy and the pathetic (Voices of the Poor, 2005). The vulnerable are a group which have characteristics for which there is no obvious remedy-disability, age, widowhood, and childlessness (Voices of the Poor, 2005).

Deprivation, powerless and voiceless

There are many poverties of deprivations (Chambers, 2006). Dimensions of the bad life include not only income-poverty and material lack, but many others, for example poverty of time, living and working in bad places – “the places of the poor” and bad social, especially gender, relations (Chambers, 2006). Other poor people use their bodies as their main assets which are indivisible, uninsured, and vulnerable to flipping from assets to

liabilities; resulting in many aspects of insecurity, worry, anxiety and pervasively powerlessness (Chambers, 2006)

Ill-being

Human capital is comprised of health (Grossman, 1972). For those lacking material and productive assets, labor power is the core component of most survival strategies and therefore is perhaps the most important human capital asset (Latvia 1998; Tunisia 1995; Senegal 1995). Loss of a productive adult whether due to disease, death, divorce, or neglect drastically reduces a household's capacity to overcome external shocks and is one of the main causes of destitution (World Bank, 2005). The PPAs reveal that more than anything else, poor people dread serious illness within the family. Illness removes individuals from the labor pool and can push a household into poverty. Where formal institutions provide inadequate safety nets, the illness of one person within the family can affect the economic stability of the entire household (Voices of the Poor, 2005). Fieldwork shows that disease, sometimes followed by premature death, is often the cause of extreme poverty, which explains why communities routinely mention poor health (including disability) as one of the characteristics of the poorest people (Voices of the Poor, 2005). Illness creates a devastating and lasting drain on household resources. In Pakistan, a father in Lahore explained that it had taken him eight years to repay debts acquired after he, his wife, and two of their children had been hospitalized (Voices of the Poor, 2005).

Lack of education

"The thirst for letters," or literacy is mostly valued everywhere (World Bank, 2005). In most developing countries, people believe that illiteracy limits the ability of individuals to secure employment, follow written instructions, and take advantage of government services or access to credit (Voices of the Poor, 2005). Poor people recognize that literacy would help them to manage their lives better. They understand that illiteracy made them more dependent,

less enterprising and more vulnerable to the machinations of the educated (World Bank, 2005). While literacy is clearly valued, education received mixed reviews from the poor. It is often difficult for poor families to invest in education (MICS, 2014). Yet, elsewhere in Zimbabwe, the usefulness of education is now doubted, particularly when it is not associated with jobs and wealth (MICS, 2014). In Eastern Europe, there is growing skepticism about the value of education when economic opportunities are shrinking and opportunities seem to come only through connections (World Bank, 2005). We managed to define poverty as a complex multidimensional absence of well-being characterized by absolute or relative lack of income, basic resources, inability to participate in the activities that are encouraged or approved by the society, lack of freedom of expression and lack of power associated with social discrimination, exclusion and deprivation of human rights.

Antecedents

Antecedents are events and circumstances which occur prior to the occurrence of the concept and often associated with the occurrence of the same concept (Walker & Avant, 2005). Through literature review it has been found that ignorance, laziness, bad luck, diseases, dishonesty and dependency are the primary antecedents of poverty (Niemela, 2009). Lack of markets, lack of skill, lack of capital, poor infrastructure, bad governance and unemployment are the other antecedents of poverty (Niemela, 2009). There is substantial support for individual blame on the antecedents of poverty that the poor are lazy and have only themselves to blame for some of their economic hardships (Niemela, 2009). However, these antecedents differ as we move to specific groups of people. Lack of skills, lack of opportunities and lack of infrastructure has blame on the governments for those living in remote rural areas (Niemela, 2009). Fatalistic antecedents of poverty such as being unlucky and maybe involved in body disfigurement makes poor

people to think that bad luck has an effect on their poverty (Voices of the Poor, 2005). In terms of dependency poor people are taken to be those who receive social benefits in consequence of their lack of means (Spicker, 1999).

Consequences

Consequences are those events or incident that occurs as a result of occurrence (Walker and Avant, 2005). Consequences that can occur due to poverty include hunger, malnutrition, severe illness, increased morbidity and mortality, increased school drop outs, social discrimination, corruption and abuse (UNDP, 2012).

DISCUSSION

Model Case

Chenhamo is a 37-year-old married man with five children and is presently living and working at Highbury Estates with his family. He started his work at the farm as a general laborer in the fields seven years ago for a commercial maize and tobacco farmer. The farmer also acts as a moneylender in many of the surrounding villages. Six years ago, Chenhamo took out a loan of approximately \$1000 that he needed for an unexpected emergency after his wife was involved in a road traffic accident. The loan conditions required him to pay monthly instalments of \$80 per month for three years. As a term of the loan, Chenhamo was compelled to work for the farmer as an agricultural laborer on the moneylender's farm for a wage of only \$100 per month. This farmer/money lender provides Chenhamo and his family with accommodation, food, and some money for miscellaneous expenses, while keeping account of everything that is provided. None of Chenhamo's children go to school due to unavailability of enough money for school fees. Chenhamo's eldest son who is 17 years old works at the farmer's homestead as a garden boy but he is not paid any money since he eat all his meals from food prepared by the farmer's wife.

After three years of servicing his loan, Chenhamo owed more than 200 percent more to the farmer than he had initially borrowed due to the interest incurred on the loan, charges for food and accommodation, small loans provided on an on-going basis and so on. However, despite this dismal situation Chenhamo was not able to leave the maize and tobacco farmer in search of more profitable work. If he attempted to leave, or flee, it is reported that the moneylender would track him down and the consequences would undoubtedly be serious. After five years of work as an agricultural laborer for the farmer, Chenhamo now owes over \$3000. Chenhamo find that he is virtually powerless since he entered the vicious cycle of contractual labor, where he is compelled to concede to the tyranny and exploitation from the farmer. But for his situation, there is no alternative source of loans and in certain circumstances he have no choice but to accept the exploitative terms of the local maize and tobacco farmer.

Analysis

From the above model case all the attributes and characteristics of poverty are seen. Attributes such as lack of income, lack of education, ill being, and vulnerability, relative deprivation, powerless and voiceless are clearly seen. Lack of adequate income and other assets results in lack of capabilities and functioning and the cycle of poverty continues.

Contrary Case

Honorable minister Madhola stays in the leafy Nashville suburb in the capital city. He possesses 25 solid and stable houses in the town. All his three children are being educated abroad with the assistance of his executive ministerial benefits. Honorable Madhola never lacks money and is able to save more money from his ministerial allowances. Honorable Madhola owns 10 commercial farms and he is capable of managing all his farms since he is also a holder of a bachelor's degree in crop science and farm management. In addition to his academic portfolio he has a

master's degree in business management. The minister always adhere to a healthy life style by regularly exercising, having medical checkups and desist from unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and heavy drinking. After every month he affords to spend a week in any holiday resort areas in Dubai with his wife. Due to his strong political muscle he has the power and voice to get warm reception at many public and private places in the country. He usually donates cash, groceries and maize meal in his constituency.

Analysis

A contrary case does not include any of the attributes of the concept (Walker & Avant, 2005). Mr Madhola is a person who experiences well-being in terms of income, food, shelter and psychological stability. He is capable of achieving his goals and wishes without any obstacles. From the above case Mr Madhola is a rich man who has authority, voice and power over others.

Empirical referents

Empirical referents of a concept are classes or categories of actual concept that by their existence demonstrate the occurrence of the concept (Walker & Avant, 2005). Determining the empirical referents for the defining attributes is the final step of a concept analysis (Walker & Avant, 2005). There are several published poverty measurement instruments in existence. For the purpose of this paper, the key steps in measurement of poverty are to specify a minimal socially acceptable level of income or consumption (poverty line), implement a representative survey in which the corresponding income or consumption concept is measured and calculate a specific measure. The most common implementation of these steps is to have fixed monetary consumption-based threshold for poverty with data coming from a household survey and poverty measured as percentage of individuals with per capita consumption below the poverty line (World Bank, 2005).

The analytical application of the capability approach has been developed and diffused through UNDP's human

development reports (HDR) (Fukuda-Parr, 2006). They view poverty as reflecting the lack of choices and opportunities in the key areas of education, health and command over resources (Fukuda-Parr, 2006). Human development index (HDI) is the first HDR introduced in 1990 (Fukuda-Parr, 2006). even though there is a shift to a multidimensional poverty concept, monitoring has continued to rely on the income measure. At global level, the US\$1/person /day measure developed and updated regularly by the World Bank is the one that is consistently used to measure the size and trends in global poverty. However, a composite measure is always needed to make an overall assessment that can aggregate the different features of deprivation.

In 1996 the HDR introduced the human poverty index (HPI) to fill the gap of deprivation (Fukuda-Parr, 2006). HPI is a composite measure set in the capability and human development space, drawing on the several perspectives of poverty (Fukuda-Parr, 2006). HPI is a measure of capability deprivation and aims to capture poverty as distinct from income poverty. Neither HPI nor HDI include indicators of political freedom, security and transparency. It is noted that important aspects of poverty, notably those relating to participation such as political freedom and cultural choices are not quantifiable, but still HPI is a more adequate measure of deprivations in human lives than the income poverty measure (Fukuda-Parr, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The definition of poverty provided by the authors will assist in going an extra mile in understanding the concept of poverty. Understanding of the concept of poverty will assist in standardization of tools used to measure and monitor poverty with the intention of eradicating poverty. Universal tools of measurement of poverty shed more clarity in reporting poverty. This paper managed to define poverty and its attributed and provided a working definition. It snow left with programmers

and development practitioners to then come up with holistic approaches to totally address poverty for successful empowerment and development.

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