

*IAOS-IASS Joint Conference on:
Poverty, Social Exclusion and Development.
A Statistical Perspective*

**Session on:
Poverty analysis through anthropologists' and sociologists' approaches :
« The voice of the poor »**

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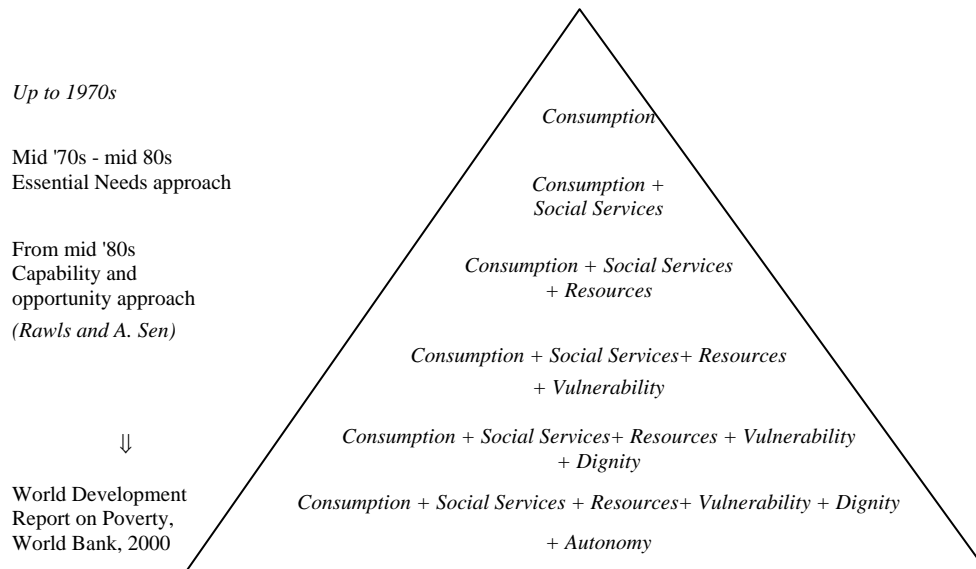
**Introduction of the session on:
Poverty analysis through anthropologists' and sociologists' approaches :
« The voice of the poor »**

Mireille Razafindrakoto

The gradual widening of the concept of poverty

Analysis of poverty has gradually become more complex as new “poverty areas” have been taken into account. From a purely physiological approach, there has been a move in successive stages to a more global concept, taking account of the fact that individual needs and integration in society do not depend solely on a level of food consumption that ensures biological survival.

Gradual widening of the concept of poverty since the 1970s



Source : from Killick et alii, (2000).

The monetary approach, the most intuitive one, was adopted since the studies made by Booth and Rowntree of poverty in English towns at the end of the nineteenth century, which were based on the idea of a subsistence level.

However, not all dimensions of poverty can be evaluated by the monetary approach: what price should be attributed to the consumption of public goods, to leisure time, to the intensity of social relations or, more broadly, to the quality of life?

- These limitations have led a certain number of researchers to propose alternative approaches, such as "essential or "basic needs" (Streeten et al., 1981), which revert to the concept of "primary goods" put forward by Rawls (1971).

- Sen (1983, 1993, 1997) formulated a new approach of poverty through the notion of "lack of capabilities": In his view, rather than the "functionings", regarded as an end (consumption, income), it is the means of reaching this end – the capacity to mobilise the available resources – that has to be highlighted.

One of the consequences of this broadening of the subject is to establish the junction with the approaches to poverty of a more sociological or anthropological nature, centred on the notion of social exclusion, and which take into account the notion of vulnerability, insecurity, dignity. Some sections of the population see themselves as marginalised in relation to the way of life that is either predominant or regarded as socially acceptable. This exclusion leads them to develop a "culture of poverty" from which it is difficult to extricate oneself (persistence of poverty). This question comes down to reflecting on the reproduction mechanisms within a life-cycle or between generations, bringing in notions of vulnerability and insecurity. The increasingly systematic use by the World Bank of qualitative techniques based on participatory groups (surveys in the social anthropological tradition notably under the general heading of "participatory poverty assessment"), is the most tangible sign of this convergence (World Bank, 2000).

Two less classical approaches of poverty

Since the one-dimensional vision implicit in the monetary approach is still prevailing, the idea in this session is to explore two less classical approaches of poverty and to show that original results can be derived from these type of studies.

The subjective approach (versus the objective one): what is at stake?

Most of the time, different approaches of poverty are considered with the aim of defining objective measures (setting a value on the poverty threshold). The analyst decides both the fields (essential needs) and the level needed to escape from a situation of poverty, independently of the satisfaction expressed by the agents themselves. This approach is clearly normative and in all cases involves a certain degree of arbitrariness. It obliges the population to share the values and aspirations of the analyst himself, as well as his point of view on what he considers to be the "normal" way of life in a given society. The subjective measures aim to relax these constraints by allowing each individual to assess his own level of well-being or the difficulties he encounters in life.

The idea of collecting opinions from the various groups which make up a society, notably the poor, and involving them in a participatory process relies on the fact that it can give more insight into the circumstances of the poor and allow the most effective policies to be identified. The objective of this new approach is also to enhance the ability of poor people to make their voice heard and to effectively influence public decisions affecting their lives ("voice" and "empowerment"). It can be a way (means) to overcome, at least partly, the lack of capabilities pointed out by Amartya Sen in the framework of his poverty concept.

The "Capital social" for each individual

The notion of social capital can have different interpretations. We focus here on the French concept of "capital social" derived from the participation to social life (association, mutual assistance, etc.). It can be also defined by opposition of being "socially excluded".

The difficulties to capture empirically the concept of social exclusion may explain why few economists address this subject and make the link with poverty analysis. Social exclusion may be based on a subjective feeling (considering oneself to be excluded) or objective

considerations (low degree of participation in economic, political or social life, exclusion from mutual aid and solidarity networks, etc).

But whatever the approach adopted to measure social exclusion, the idea of a lack of participation to the life of the society remains implicit. Thus, participation is considered as a means to escape from poverty, but also as an ends in itself.

The recent new wave of empirical research on these issues

These two types of approaches – the subjective one and the one based on social exclusion – were used to be considered as more “qualitative” and more usually addressed by sociologists and anthropologists. But in the recent years, a new wave of studies – conducted not only by sociologists or anthropologists but also by economists – tackle the issue of subjective well-being and make the link with poverty analysis. At the same time, the relationship between self-esteem or social participation, on one side, and poverty on the other, is more frequently addressed.

Unfortunately, the subjective dimension of poverty is still rarely discussed in the context of the poor countries. It should be stressed that while this approach is beginning to be the subject of far-reaching research in developed countries, it remains virtually quasi-unexplored paradoxically in developing countries, especially in Africa, despite the fact that these are the countries most affected by poverty.

The promotion of the "Participatory Poverty Assessment" (PPA) schemes which have been set up in many poor countries at the instigation of the World Bank have brought changes. The stress placed nowadays on some new principles like ‘Empowerment’, ‘Participation’ and ‘Voicing’ means that new approach of poverty are to be explored.

The three invited contributions

The session subscribes to the objective of exploring original tools for understanding poverty, and of giving opportunities to the poor allowing them to express their opinion (voice) and to participate in the decision-making process.

The three contributions are:

- Refining Policy with the Poor - Participatory research in Vietnam. By *Carrie Turk (World Bank)* presented by *Bill Tod (Save the Children, UK)*

- Assisting others and being assisted. System and structure of social support in Antananarivo (Madagascar) and in Paris (France). By *Isabelle Parizot (INSERM)* and *Jean-Michel Wachsberger (EHESS, DIAL)*

- Poverty, Democracy and the Role of the State. Attitudes and Perceptions of the Poor in West African Countries and Madagascar. By *Mireille Razafindrakoto and François Roubaud (IRD – DIAL)*

The three papers give an international perspective since analysis are on three continents: Asia (Vietnam), Africa (seven West African countries and Madagascar) and Europe (France). At the same time, the angles from which the studies are approached are of three types since the authors are from three different backgrounds: NGOs with the World Bank (Institutions); Sociologists (Researchers); Economists (Researchers).

1. « *Refining Policy with the Poor - Participatory research in Vietnam* ».

The choice of this subject is justified by the fact that Vietnam is an example of success in the implementation of the participatory process in order to elaborate the PRSP (or the CPRGS in Vietnam: Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategies).

This contribution presents how the local consultations (interviews) helped to refine and to complete the results of more classical approaches (derived from LSMS or Living Standard Measuring Survey).

2. “*Assisting others and being assisted. System and structure of social support in Antananarivo (Madagascar) and in Paris (France)*”.

This study was conducted by two sociologists. The contribution addresses the issue of social support and social integration (“Capital social”, participation in mutual assistance). Characteristics of those who provide and/or receive assistance and of the excluded are explored empirically using detailed databases. The authors try to examine how the structure of social support is linked to other objective variables (monetary poverty) and subjective variables (self esteem).

The article gives an original comparative viewpoint since a very poor country (Madagascar) is compared to an industrialised one (France). It is particularly interesting since the approaches adopted in the two geographical areas are usually unconnected.

This analysis contributes to an International Programme SIRS (Santé, Inégalités et Ruptures Sociales) conducted jointly in different cities (Paris, Varsovie, Sao Paulo, New York, Madagascar).

3. *Poverty, Democracy and the Role of the State. Attitudes and Perceptions of the Poor in West African Countries and Madagascar.*

This contribution subscribes to the idea of relaying the aspirations and the perceptions of the poor (or more broadly the population in poor countries) so that the “voice of the poor” can be heard. The study is based on original and comparable detailed data derived from qualitative modules on Governance and Democracy (in the form of opinion polls) grafted onto conventional household quantitative surveys. The compatibility of the attitudes of the poor with the proposed general strategic orientations in these countries is examined.

This analysis contributes to an International Programme “the METAGORA Project: Measuring Democracy, Governance and Human Rights” (coordinated by PARIS21).