



Theories of Global Poverty

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Theories of Global Poverty: Comparing Developed World and Developing World Frameworks

Jennifer Morazes
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ABSTRACT. In September 2000, participants in the United Nations Millennium Summit made a commitment to alleviating global poverty and inequality through the Millennium Development goals. This historical pledge has raised public and academic awareness of the issue of global poverty. In light of this interest, this literature review seeks to clarify the issues surrounding global poverty by focusing on the developed world and the developing world. Given the substantial amount of interdisciplinary research on global poverty, it can be organized into at least four areas: poverty definitions, units of measurement, theories concerning resources, and findings on effective interventions. It is clear that context influences these four areas and the resulting theories relate to: (1) inclusion, exclusion, and access; (2) individual rights and responsibilities versus community focus; (3) human capital theories, structural poverty, and resource inequality; and (4) theories of welfare versus theories of development. This analysis of these four theoretical domains concludes with a conceptual framework for understanding of global poverty and the influence of the social environment on human behavior. doi:10.1300/J137v16n01_08 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains a stark reality to more than 2.5 billion people around the world who live on US\$2 a day or less (Watkins, 2005). Developed and developing countries are all challenged to seek lasting solutions to end poverty within their own borders, but with increased economic globalization in recent decades, the need for collective action to tackle international poverty has become increasingly pressing as the disparities in population and resource distribution become increasingly vivid. From elite international conversations of top government representatives through the United Nations and International Trade Organizations, to the popular yet political expressions of the lead singer Bono of the Irish rock band U2, a collective energy has gathered at a time of, as Nelson Mandela described it, “massive poverty and obscene inequality . . . rank[ing] alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils” (Watkins, 2005).

Among the goals announced in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit was the bold pledge to halve the level of extreme poverty by 2015 through the implementation of and collective commitment to eight Millennium Development Goals. Progress made thus far in alleviating poverty is further encouraged by the recent commitment of 15 European Union countries to earmark 0.7% of their national income for international aid (United Nations, 2002, 2005). With such levels of attention and commitment, there is a critical ongoing need for reliable and credible research on poverty to support national and international poverty alleviation efforts. This paper reviews the literature on global poverty with specific consideration to comparing the theories of poverty in both developing and developed nations. Given the population and resource differences between these two portions of the world, it follows that theories of poverty would correspondingly reflect the context of the theories. The goal is to explore concepts within these theories that can provide insight into the nature of poverty along the lines of status, political position, and region.

The six sections of this analysis begin with a description of search efforts in retrieving suitable literature and a review of articles describing developed and developing world perspectives on poverty. These articles are analyzed and a table of the key concepts is presented in order to identify the concepts in the form of a framework. The paper concludes

with implications for both poverty research and teaching about global poverty within an HBSE course.

LITERATURE SEARCH METHODS

The search of relevant bibliographic material included full-text articles in print and electronic journals, abstracting journals, textbooks, web pages, international agency reports, and electronic databases. The articles that were reviewed were very broad in scope and ranged from conceptual definitions and measurements of poverty to specific poverty reduction programs. The articles selected for this analysis were reviewed in light of their theoretical contribution to our understanding of global poverty.

The following bibliographic sources were utilized for this review:

1. Websites:

- Asian Development Bank: <http://www.adb.org>;
- The Department for International Development (United Kingdom): <http://www.dfid.co.uk>;
- The Free Africa Foundation: <http://www.freeafrica.org/>;
- The Millennium Project: <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/index.htm>;
- The One Campaign: <http://www.one.org/About.html>;
- The U.S. World Census: <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/world.html>;
- UN Development Reports: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>;
- The World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org>;
- World Resource Institute: <http://earthtrends.wri.org>

2. Databases:

Expanded Academic Database; LexisNexis Academic Database; The Scholarly Journal Archive; Sociological Abstracts; International Bibliography of Social Sciences and Social Services Abstracts

3. Google Scholar search engine

4. University of California, Berkeley Pathfinder

GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

The goal of this analysis is to illustrate various theories of poverty related to a global context. It is important to note that the theories of

poverty located in the interdisciplinary literature were often embedded within policy, development, and implementation discussions. This literature often utilizes a value-laden approach linked to an overall theoretical approach to addressing global poverty. This analysis, therefore, does not include an overview of various theories of political economy (i.e., Marxism, capitalism, populism, liberalism) or a consideration of theoretical policy analysis approaches (i.e., representational theory, normative theory, explanatory theory).¹ Another limitation of this review is that it is not comprehensive because the issue of global poverty cannot be adequately addressed in one short review article. Instead, the goal of this analysis is to compare approaches to poverty in the developed and developing world in order to identify similarities and differences as well as underlying themes that are useful for understanding how the social environment can impact human behavior throughout the world. And finally, this review is based on two important assumptions about theories of global poverty; namely that there are important distinctions between the developed and the developing world with respect to poverty and that the concepts of poverty and inequality within the analysis are linked together but do require further investigation.

REVIEW AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERATURE

The vast literature on global poverty reflects multidisciplinary viewpoints that diverge as often they converge. For example, as early as eighteenth century America, Adam Smith—often regarded as the definitive market capitalist—defined and illustrated poverty in both absolute and relative ways:

By necessities I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, nobody can well fall into without extreme bad conduct. (Smith, 1776)

The expanded definitions of poverty go beyond the lack of indispensable commodities (absolute) to those considered necessary for a given context (relative). In addition, theories of poverty intrinsically raise issues of poverty measurement and effective intervention. Current research on poverty points to the many perspectives emerging out of various disciplines, including cultural studies, economics and social sciences. In this paper, the theories of poverty are compared in terms of the differences of viewpoint between developing countries and developed countries.

Theories of Poverty Among Developed Countries

The discourse on poverty in developed countries focuses on increasing our understanding of the causes and solutions related to poverty alleviation. The analyses of poverty have moved away from a focus on absolute poverty, as “a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs” (*The Copenhagen Declaration*, 2000), to one defined as relative, encompassing the complexities of poverty in contemporary, post-industrial societies. For example, these complexities include welfare provisions, benefits from the state, tax systems, social security transfers, education, social exclusion, social capital, feminization of poverty, and inequality.

Esping-Andersen’s “three regime” theory of social welfare policy formation in the developed world provides a framework for understanding current theories of poverty in developed nations. The framework differentiates between liberal (i.e., *laissez-faire*), corporatist and social democratic models of welfare, reflecting the degree to which social rights and responsibilities are balanced when social welfare provisions are dispensed. Under these categories, the United States, UK, Australia, and Canada are viewed as more market-oriented “liberal” states that have less generous benefits, while Sweden, Denmark, and Norway are more generous social democratic states. Balancing generosity with responsibility, the corporatist states like France, German, and Italy have welfare rights that are also tied with social position as well as income (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The categories established by Esping-Andersen reflect societal views about the roots of poverty in the developed world. For example, social democrats view welfare assistance as a right of citizenship and see poverty as a systemic concern and normal result of a market-economy. In contrast, more market-espousing states tend to connect poverty with individual deficiencies. Rank et al. (2003) further develop the social versus individual blame approaches to poverty by identifying American poverty theory and research as focusing primarily on individual characteristics.

These researchers found that individual characteristics attributed to “cause” poverty range from “the lack of an industrious work ethic or virtuous morality, to low levels of education or competitive market skills” (Rank et al., 2003, p. 1).

Rank et al. suggest an alternative theory of poverty based on: (1) the lack of sufficient jobs that provide a living wage, (2) the ineffective nature of current government “safety nets,” and (3) the experience of poverty-level income that is episodic throughout an adult’s lifetime. All of these observations, according to Rank, point to a theory where the experience of poverty in the United States is actually the result of vulnerabilities inherent in the system rather than the lack of human capital, personal deficiencies, and demographics. These system vulnerabilities include the growing number of jobs paying less than a living wage.

The findings of Rank et al. (2003) suggest that experiences of poverty in the United States are more widespread than most citizens believe and therefore lead to the importance of measuring both relative and absolute poverty throughout the lifespan. In contrast to American poverty theorists, European poverty researchers are focusing on theories of social exclusion to explain poverty in developed countries. Hills and Stewart (2005) explore pathways of social inclusion and exclusion by focusing on education, employment, health, and political and social participation. They define social exclusion as more than the lack of material resources by reframing poverty as a characteristic of society at large that fosters lack of participation. Working on the definition of social exclusion developed by Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (as cited in Hills & Stewart, 2005, p. 15), poverty is regarded as non-participation in consumption, production, political engagement, and social interaction. The need to empower the poor is central to the operationalization and measurement of social exclusion, particularly as, for example, two-fifths of the total real increase in personal income in Great Britain between 1979 and 1999 went to the top 10% of the income distribution and more than one-sixth of the total increase went to the top 1% (p. 1).

The burgeoning gap in inequality is therefore an important part of the discourse on poverty, where inequality is not confined to income alone, but also defined in terms of limited opportunities for the poor and a redistribution of resources in society (Hills & Stewart, 2005). Furthermore, the use of the concept of exclusion allows governments to expand the scope of poverty analysis beyond quantitative lines of income trajectories. The official adoption of social exclusion as a social phenomenon to be addressed through policies and programs allows for policy discussions to move beyond child poverty, pensioner poverty,

and working-age poverty to include health and neighborhood inequalities in addition to income inequality.

Social exclusion frameworks focus the discussion of poverty on the widening income gaps between groups in developed nations. Establishing a consistent measure of poverty from a wide range of possibilities (income, material resources, social connections, relative deprivation) is one concern of such theories, as well as psycho-societal factors of the poverty experience. Is poverty a product of social isolation or exclusion, for example, or does one perceive his/herself to be poor only when exposed to one who possesses more income? Sen (1997) defined the experience of poverty as a function of opportunity, by what people can do or be in a given context relative to possibilities for others. Many factors can be used to account for these perceptions of poverty, including money income, availability of items for purchase, and resources needed to meet basic needs (including food, health, and housing). As Prime Minister Blair (2005) stated:

The issue isn't in fact whether the very richest person ends up becoming richer. The issue is whether the poorest person is given the chance that they don't otherwise have . . . the justice for me is concentrated on lifting incomes of those that don't have a decent income. It's not a burning ambition of mine to make sure that David Beckham (soccer celebrity) earns less money. (as cited in Hills & Stewart, 2005, p. 233)

While inequality in income and other areas are clearly central to the larger discussion of social exclusion across the developed countries, some have argued that the idea of social exclusion/social inclusion runs counter to the redistributive and egalitarian notions of social rights and social justice and that attention needs to be given to policies and programs that directly or indirectly benefit the rich (Baratz & Grigsby, 1972; Levitas, 2005; Øyen, 2002). If living standards continue to rise and inequality ignored, programs and policies encouraging social inclusion and alleviating poverty will not be entirely effective.

The notions of social rights and social justice relate to the individual's relationship to the state and the extent to which needs and opportunities are the responsibility of the state or the individual. The theory of poverty that relates to the rights of citizenship follows a more social democratic philosophy where the state is the identified resource provider based solely upon citizenship. The Scandinavian welfare model (Else et al., 2005) illustrates the structural theory of poverty related to vulnerabilities in market systems rather than in the character of individuals. In

this model, citizens are deemed worthy of government benefits based on their membership in that society, rather than proof of need. This distinction reflects the continuing tension between individual and structural theories of poverty that generally do not account for the growing inequality within nations.

The issue of inequality is explored extensively by Australian scholars (Western, Dwan, & Kebonang, 2005) who sought to address the following questions by reviewing articles from 1960 to 2002 in the *Australian Journal of Social Issues*: "What issues pertaining to social inequality were of most interest to the readers and editors of *AJSI*?" and "How were these issues perceived and empirically understood?" (Western, Dwan, & Kebonang, 2005, p. 125).

In presenting their findings, Western et al. (2005) noted that there was more agreement among scholars in defining and understanding social inequality and very little consensus about the various definitions of poverty; they found that social inequality is defined as a "result of differential access to scarce and valued social resources by some individuals and groups, on the grounds of structural factors beyond their control" (Western et al., 2005, p. 127). The factors that influence inequality and the accessibility to resources include: Aboriginal origins, class, ethnicity, gender, age and space (urban-rural differences), and these findings were correlated to the concepts of crime, education, health, housing, income/wealth, occupation, and unemployment. Access difficulties for resources and well as the disproportionate representation of negative social factors across communities resulted in the inequality experienced along these social lines.

As the descriptions of theories above suggest, poverty research from the perspective of the developed world contains four characteristics. First, poverty is defined as person's inclusion or exclusion in a given social context. In terms of the unit of measurement, the literature largely focuses on individuals in terms of inclusion, exclusion, and accountability. Alternative literature suggests researching system vulnerabilities rather than individual deficiencies; this alternative is also present in the debate between universal or selective qualifications for benefit eligibility. Third, discussion of resource distribution tends to focus on the qualities of human capital necessary to earn resources or inclusion within society; literature on structural poverty provides another perspective involving the functioning of the distribution systems. Finally, welfare "benefits" are the primary unit of intervention rather than poverty's origins. The discussion of inequality in developed world literature usually reflects the perspective of non-dominant communities such as racial

and ethnic groups; therefore, theories of poverty's origins can be overshadowed by more mainstream theories focusing on individual deficiencies and market distribution.

The next section considers theorists who seek to offer explanations for and solutions to poverty in the developing world. Although different points of view are included in depth, the themes of poverty definitions, units of analysis, resource distribution and interventions are explored emphasizing different dimensions than in the developed world literature. These differences suggest frameworks considering global poverty are influenced by context. Given the fact that 5.2 billion of the world's 6.2 billion people live in the developing world, and 2.5 billion of the developing world's people live at or below US\$2/day (Sachs, 2005a), an overview of the theoretical literature provides a fuller picture of the human lifespan and how both privilege and poverty affect behavior and perspective. This 2.5 billion people represents 40% of the world's population and only 5% of global income (Watkins, 2005), challenging mainstream notions of "normative" developmental course in light of the economic environment that faces the majority of the world's inhabitants.

Theories of Poverty Among Developing Countries

The focus on social inequality and poverty in the United States, Europe, and Australia provides a stark contrast to extant literature on poverty in the developing world where most measurements and poverty levels are based on purchasing power parity (e.g., the World Bank's US\$1 a day for absolute poverty and US\$2 a day for relative poverty). The standardization of poverty measurements in developing countries is based on often debatable and varying definitions of poverty. The large body of literature on poverty in the developing world emphasizes the causes and consequences of poverty in terms of income or economic poverty, yet more complex models are suggested. Three notable economists reviewed below exemplify the diverging views of poverty discourse among developing countries.

In his newly published book *The End of Poverty* (2005), Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs outlines a plan grander than the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations, namely, to reduce extreme poverty by 50% by 2015 and to eliminate extreme poverty all together by 2025. Using case studies of specific countries, Sachs refers to his methods as "differential diagnosis" in "clinical economics" (Sachs, pp. 74-89) that address the root cause of poverty. Presence or

absence of the following seven categories of symptoms are used to craft a strategy for addressing poverty: (1) the poverty trap, (2) economic policy framework, (3) fiscal framework and fiscal trap, (4) physical geography, (5) governance patterns and failures, (6) cultural barriers, and (7) geopolitics. While some of the symptoms relate to conditions such as human capital, investment policy, trade policy, and population densities, the differential diagnosis framework is unique in that it seeks to combine many factors before intervention is designed and implemented.

Such an innovative way to understanding poverty, particularly in the field of economics, addresses some of the limitations of current poverty reduction programs that utilize a one-size-fits-all prescription. In Sachs' view, a new multifaceted and holistic approach to addressing poverty ought to be applied to improve poverty reduction programs, and also to educate and train economists. Critical of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Sachs likens the organization's obligatory budget-austere prescription imposed on impoverished countries to ". . . eighteenth century medicine, when doctors used leeches to draw blood from their patients, often killing them in the process" (Sachs, 2005a, p. 74). Sachs does not suggest a process of ignoring the contribution of economists, but rather calls for the inclusion of knowledge from other disciplines that are often neglected in the field of economic development.

One example of a multidisciplinary approach is the role of geography as it relates to a country's transport conditions, population density, agronomic conditions and disease ecology as relates to hunger. With this model, it is possible to address the following questions: "What is the length of the growing season, and how does that affect crop choice, nutrition, and income levels?" (Sachs, 2005a, p. 86) and "What are the key patterns of animal disease that may have major effects on agricultural productivity . . . ?" (p. 87). In this situation, differential diagnosis is implemented to account for the multiple factors leading to outcomes that may be unaccounted for in a more classical model. He views his approach as a new "enlightenment" approach to globalization that is inclusive of "a globalization of democracies, multilateralism, science and technology, and a global economic system designed to meet human needs" (Sachs, 2005b, p. 358).

The approach by Sachs is in stark contrast to Bhalla's (2002) neoclassical economic interpretation of poverty and growth in developing countries. Like Sachs, Bhalla is pro-globalization, but Bhalla's goals for global poverty reduction are strictly econometric and support the conclusion that "[g]rowth is sufficient. Period." and that ". . . money income, though imperfect, is the best proxy for human welfare" (Bhalla,

2002, p. 52). In Bhalla's case, income is the primary consideration in the alleviation of poverty because income: (1) Enables the poor to have some purchasing power; (2) Provides access to resources otherwise unavailable to the poor; and (3) Enables the poor to purchase or receive free public goods (p. 52).

Bhalla (2002) presents an alternative approach to measuring poverty by counting the number of persons instead of using the World Bank standard of countries as unit of measurement. He also posits arguments that call for a reassessment of the World Bank's "... 'natural monopoly' of intellectual leadership, in-house research, and funding for research outside the bank" (Bhalla, 2002, p. 56). However, it is important to note that this approach fails to consider that marginal differences in income can easily place a person above or below the poverty line without any point of reference to actual well-being. Bhalla's thesis leads to overconfidence in achieving the Millennium Development Goals of reducing global poverty by 50% by 2015. The implication is that the liberalization and globalized flow of capital and labor represents the natural forces of free-market economies and therefore positive development outcomes.

Although Bhalla seeks to challenge the World Bank's existing measures of poverty, it is also clear that political ideologies are reflected the understanding and addressing of poverty. While Sachs is critical of the role played by the United States in war-mongering and thereby undermining its role in global peace, social justice, environmental protection, and economic stability, Bhalla takes a more conservative approach by arguing that we have just witnessed the twenty best years in global economic development as well as improving the lives of poor people (Bhalla, 2002, p. 202).

In contrast to both Sachs and Bhalla, Ayittey (2005) has developed a theory of poverty based on the perspective of the poor themselves, especially in Africa. Ayittey argues that economic freedom—rather than Sach's economic security model—is the key to Africa's future economic development. While African economic freedom was first limited by colonial powers and now by elite dictatorships, Ayittey posits that African agricultural and village economics provides a framework of enterprise and social decision-making and the basis for successful resource cultivation and distribution for both local consumption and export. Ayittey argues that the African people must be allowed the freedom to develop economically without the interference of international or foreign pressure or elite control. He notes that "Famine, civil wars, devastated agriculture, collapsed infrastructure, and political repression [as well as HIV] have sapped African vitality and sentences Atingas to near stone-aged

existence” (Ayittey, 2005, p. 15). The new paradigm of development, rather than starting from the elites, must move the African people to the center of production and governance.

While some poverty literature concerning the developed world describes alternative frameworks that discuss structural poverty and some resource inequalities, the literature of the developing world concentrates almost exclusively on issues of access, community-specific solutions, resource inequality and development. Given that more than one-third of the world’s population lives on the equivalent of US\$2 per day, the value of this perspective in the arena of global poverty theory cannot be overemphasized. The final sections of this review further develop the attributes of these frameworks and propose suggestions for future work in poverty research and education.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSIS

This analysis has addressed global poverty from the perspectives of both the developed world and developing world. The goal of this section is to compare these poverty theories and their dominant themes and concepts as summarized in Table 1. The major themes, as identified in the review, are definitions of poverty, main unit of focus or measurement, resource distribution, and theories of interventions.

The first comparison involves how the developed and developing world differ in their definitions of poverty. While the idea of social exclusion in the European literature refers to intra-country poverty and the difference between included and excluded groups, the literature of the developing world reflects a two-pronged approach that focuses on the present global economic policies and their policies affect their local region. The developing world literature emphasizes the concept of access in contrast to the market-focused developed world perspective where poverty is regarded as an exception rather than the norm. Furthermore, the developed world theorists consider their own context primarily unless the analysis explicitly references “global poverty,” while the developing world inherently references the developed world in describing the relationships that contribute to poverty and lack of access.

The second point of comparison involves the locus of rights and responsibilities within the theoretical framework, or the unit of measurement in the poverty discussion. In the developed world analyses, the focus is on the individualistic concepts of “citizenship” and individual rights and responsibilities. In contrast, the literature of the developing

TABLE 1. Comparison of Theories of Global Poverty

THEMES	THEORIES OF POVERTY	
	Developed World	Developing World
1. Definition of Poverty	Social Exclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolute versus relative poverty • Market-based 	Lack of Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globalization through market approaches versus pro-poor growth • Critique of multi-nationalism, colonialism, racism and global economic institutions
2. Unit of Focus and Measurement	Rights of Citizenship Entitlements versus Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal versus selective benefits • Individual versus social blame/responsibility 	Community Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture-inclusive values
3. Resources	Human Capital Theories versus Structural Poverty Theories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income poverty • Welfare versus workfare 	Resource Inequality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global trade imbalances versus internal corruption; basic need distribution (food, water, medicine)
4. Interventions	Theories of welfare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market versus non-market • Public versus private • Rights versus responsibilities 	Theories of Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Capital • Trade Participation versus Internal Infrastructure

world emphasizes collectively at the community and countries levels in relationship to resources and distribution. In addition, the developing world literature emphasizes basic human needs (e.g., food, medicine, water, income) rather than the abstract principles of “participation,” “inclusion,” or “benefits” in the literature of developed countries. Developed world theorists debate universal versus selective approaches to welfare as well as individual versus social blame, while developing world theorists focus upon specific attributes and needs of whole communities experiencing minimum incomes (e.g., less than US\$1 or 2 per day).

The issue of measuring poverty leads directly to how resources are distributed within each context. In the developed world literature, the discussion centers on markets and individual productivity in reference to market functioning. In the developing world, the discussion of resources based upon merit only exists as developed apply this market-determined measure to them in order to “judge” their global performance. Developing countries and the theorists concerned with poverty

in these regions discuss global trade imbalances and policies that tend to favor post-industrialized countries (such as budget policies of the IMF). Theorists in the developing world also critique local access barriers in relationship to these global policies, such elite local governments misuse of trade monies intended to improve the quality of life for all citizens. The primary targets of accountability in terms of resource distribution are those in positions of power rather than the poor themselves.

Finally, the types of interventions also differ between developed and developing regions in terms of poverty alleviation. The developed world, through systems that are moving toward a less universal and more merit-based distribution, distinguish between those deserving and those undeserving to receive different types of welfare benefits. On the other hand, developing world literature focuses on the internal infrastructure of entire communities and regions and the capital required (in terms of skills and money) to build these systems. This issue of resource distribution is central to this discussion as it defines the extent to which communities possess the ability to grow in a sustainable direction.

**CONCLUSIONS:
A FUTURE AGENDA FOR UNDERSTANDING
GLOBAL POVERTY**

Much of the current theoretical literature on global poverty can be divided into two perspectives: theories related to developing countries and those focusing on developed countries. Understanding the conceptual frameworks resulting from the four themes of poverty definitions, measurement, resource distribution, and interventions lends legitimacy to these perspectives as they operate from their respective contexts. Furthermore, recognizing the value of these two perspectives can assist theorists in addressing the dynamics between them, such as the relationship between the poor in the developing world and the poor in the developed world. In addition, if current work on global poverty continues to be dominated by economists trained in the developed world (regardless of the authors' country of origin), then it is plausible that a disconnection between training (theory) and practice will continue to exist in finding lasting solutions to global poverty. This observation is especially relevant to writers like Midgley (2001) who view identification of different theoretical themes that are context-specific (rather than "cookie cutter" solutions) as key to social work cooperation internationally. Discussion of these differences, as well as collaborations on the international level

that lend support to local initiatives, are key to the future of social work in a development arena.

The recent devastating effects of natural disaster on the global stage (e.g., the Asian Tsunami, hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the earthquake in Pakistan) demonstrate the universal vulnerabilities of regions throughout the world when it comes to eliciting assistance and attention. These disasters provide vivid reminders of the interaction between the social environment and human behavior and challenge practitioners, educators, and theorists to investigate the relationship between poverty, racism, and economics. Martin-Baro (1994) notes in his work on liberation psychology:

What would mental health look like from the place of a tenant farmer on a hacienda, or personal maturity from someone who lives at the town dump, or motivation from someone who sells goods in a market? Note that we say . . . “from” the tenant farmer on a hacienda and the woman in the market, not “for” them. This is not a matter of thinking for them or bringing them our ideas or solving their problems for them; it has to do with thinking and theorizing with them and from them. (Martin-Baro, 1994, p. 11)

Martin-Baro directly challenges the assumptions underlying “professionalism” and its power in relationship to impoverished majorities and learning about effective interventions from, rather than for, the most vulnerable members of society. In essence, he redefines the role of the professional to include simultaneously the functions of observation and participation as well as solidarity and advocacy.

It is evident from the literature on global poverty that it is indeed a complex and multifaceted subject that warrants a more holistic and inclusive approach to understanding human behavior and the social environment. Naturally, the complexities of poverty pose a challenge in teaching, but can be managed by a multidisciplinary approach in order to cover its many aspects. The understanding of global poverty does require a historical perspective in order to provide a foundation for assessing contemporary issues of poverty as they relate to causes, conditions and solutions. It is also important for students of global poverty to be aware of the theoretical differences that underlie the study of poverty, including definitions, measurements, resource distribution, and interventions. The ultimate hope is that students will not only understand poverty, but will be better equipped to actively work for its eradication.

NOTE

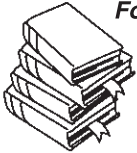
1. For a more detailed discussion, see Hall, A., & Midgley, J. (2004). *Social policy for development*. London: Sage Publication. Chapters 1 and 2.

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