Chronic Poverty Research Centre

Research Summary

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Poverty dynamics: measurement and understanding from an interdisciplinary perspective

There are three main fronts on which progress must be made if we are to deepen our understanding of why poverty occurs, and significantly improve the effectiveness of poverty reduction policies.

- First, poverty research needs to focus on poverty dynamics — over the life-course and across generations. There is now a wide acceptance that static analyses have limited explanatory power and may conceal the processes that are central to the persistence of poverty and/or its elimination.
- Second, there is a need to move efforts to measure poverty dynamics beyond mere income and consumption to more multidimensional concepts and measures of poverty. This is increasingly common in static analyses but is rare in work on poverty dynamics. This might involve assets, or more ambitiously, using concepts of human development or wellbeing.
- Third, at the same time there is a growing consensus that a thorough understanding of poverty and poverty reduction requires cross-disciplinary research, using the strengths of different disciplines and methods, and of quantitative and qualitative approaches to poverty analysis.

Thus, we believe that the next frontier in poverty research is at the intersection of the cross-disciplinary approaches to the dynamics of multidimensional poverty.

What is Chronic Poverty?

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty. Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g. consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation. This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line.

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Bringing in time to poverty analysis

It is possible to introduce time into the conceptualisation of poverty in one of two ways.

The first of these involves treating time as an ordinary dimension of wellbeing and poverty: a person is defined as **'time poor'** if he or she lacks the necessary time to achieve things of value, such as adequate sleep and rest, being with family and friends, or income. In effect, time is viewed as one of many scarce resources. This approach fits well into approaches that emphasise multidimensionality of wellbeing and poverty.

The second approach may be identified with the 'poverty and wellbeing dynamics' perspective, with a focus on how wellbeing evolves over time, what determines this evolution, and how different patterns of evolution are to be evaluated for policy. This is the approach with which we are concerned here.

Until the late 1980s, the main ways in which time featured in poverty analysis was in terms of poverty trends, seasonality, the timing of experiences and historical accounts of poverty.

- **Poverty trends** commonly contrasted headcounts of poverty across a population at two (or more) different times. However, comparing poverty trends in this sense does not tell us whether individuals or households are persistently poor or wealthy, or if they typically move into and/or out of poverty over time.

- **Historical accounts** of poverty seek to lay out and interpret main experiences and events in chronological order, with Iliffe's (1987) work moving the discourse forward through its contrast of structural and conjunctural poverty in Africa.

- The **seasonality** of livelihood activities, income, consumption, and, in particular, access to food has been another focus, especially in rural areas.

- The significance of specific poverty experiences at certain **times in the life course** has also been highlighted with a particular focus on lack of access to food/nutrition for pregnant women, and education for children. A lack of access to nutrition, basic health services or education in early life can have irreversible effects on physical and cognitive capacity.

Since the late 1980s, there has been growing interest in examining the **duration** of poverty. We believe that the duration aspect of time merits particular attention for four main reasons.

1. First, there is a simple logic that says if one person has experienced the same forms and depths of poverty as another, but for a much longer period, then a moral concern with helping the more disadvantaged requires that s/he be prioritised and supported as s/he has experienced more deprivation.

2. Second, a failure to analyse the distribution of spells in poverty in a population is likely to lead to weak analyses of why people are poor and, potentially, to weak policies.
   For example, hypothetically, two different countries might have the same scores for the headcount, depth and severity of poverty. Apparently, poverty in both of these countries is similar. However, in the first country poverty is largely transitory – a phenomenon that many of its population experience but only for short durations. In the other, most of the population are non-poor but a minority are trapped in poverty for most or all of their lives.
   In the former country policies need to help those experiencing short spells of poverty – unemployment insurance and benefits, reskilling, microcredit, temporary social safety nets, health services. In the latter, deeper structural problems must be addressed – inclusion of the poor in access to health and education services, asset redistribution, tackling social exclusion, regional infrastructural development.

3. Thirdly, recent important work has revealed the linkages between the depth of poverty, in terms of material and social assets, and duration at the household level. The assumption behind this work is that low levels of assets lead to **poverty traps** (at least in the absence of financial markets and safety nets), but a conceptualisation is needed that will also permit an analysis of the ways in which the duration of poverty leads to depleted asset levels.

4. Finally, the duration of time spent in poverty has important implications for individual (particularly child) and household future strategies. This is in terms of physical and cognitive capabilities, and the ways in which past experience shapes the agency (motivation, preferences and understandings) of people.

Economists initially led the way in the examination of poverty duration, through studies of **transitory and chronic poverty, poverty dynamics** and patterns of **poverty spells**, often through the use of **poverty transition matrices** (see for example Baulch and Hoddinott 2000). While these studies have helped to put duration on the research agenda, their narrow focus on income or consumption poverty means that they have, at best, only tangentially linked up with the conceptual advances promoted by Amartya Sen and others. This pattern has continued, and almost all panel datasets (see below) available on developing countries assess the standard of living only in terms of income or consumption. Baulch and Masset (2003) have produced one of the few studies that broaden panel dataset analysis to human development measures.

In the CPRC volume, Günther and Klasen (2009) analyse nutrition, health, and education poverty indicators for Vietnamese panel data, selecting households with at least two generations present. They argue that non-income indicators can be as good (and sometimes better) as income at capturing intergenerational poverty transmission: income tells only part of the story. Vietnam is especially relevant since the economy is experiencing fast growth and structural change. There has been a sharp decline in income poverty, but nutrition and health indicators show fewer households escaping from poverty. Overall there is a lower correlation between non-income and income measures than one would expect. Günther and Klasen find intergenerational education poverty remains particularly strong; many households with low education among the older generation also have low education among the young.

Methods and disciplines in poverty analysis

Over the past decade, there has been growing interaction between two strands of, or two approaches to, poverty analysis in developing countries – **the qualitative and the quantitative.** Interaction between these two approaches has been forced to some extent by the strengthening requirement of development agencies to expand the traditional quantitative base of their poverty assessments with a qualitative component. While 'mixed methods' frameworks have of course been present in the literature outside of development, and in the academic literature more generally, it is undoubtedly true that the degree of interest in such methods for poverty analysis in developing countries has heightened considerably.

Quantitative approaches

- The information base comes from statistically representative income/expenditure type household surveys (which may also have a wide range of modules covering other aspects of wellbeing and activity).
- The questionnaire in these surveys is of 'fixed response' type, with little scope for unstructured discussion on the issues.
- Statistical/econometric analysis is carried out to investigate and test causality.
- 'Neo-classical *homo economicus*' theorising underlies the development of hypotheses, interpretation of results, and understanding of causality.

Qualitative approaches

- Unstructured interviews, the outcomes from which are then analysed with textual analysis methods.
- Related to the above, use of interviews to develop 'life histories' of individuals.
- Participatory Poverty Analysis, where a community as a whole is helped to discuss, to define and to identify poverty.
- Ethnography, involving immersion of the analyst into the community in question over a significant length of time to get a deeper understanding of the context.
- Related to all of the above, anthropological and sociological theorising to understand results and discuss causality.

This suggests that qualitative approaches are better suited to emphasising deeper contextual processes, relevant for both understanding, and for the local level implementation of policy. On the other hand, whether a phenomenon is widespread or only locally relevant is better addressed by quantitative studies.

Three further points can be made on the above characterisation.

1. First, while the quantitative category is relatively uniform, the qualitative category is relatively diverse. The unifying (homogenising) force of the economic method is felt in the former, while the latter is a battle ground across, and indeed within, disciplines.
2. Second, some analyses do combine elements of both, and are on a continuum between the qualitative and the quantitative, rather than being strictly one or the other. Thus the qualitative-quantitative distinction might best be viewed as a tendency rather than as a discrete divide.
3. Third, the qualitative-quantitative divide to some extent aligns with, and to some extent cuts across, disciplinary divides in poverty analysis, especially as between economics and the other social sciences.

The advantages and disadvantages of the two types of approaches are becoming better understood and are well-illustrated by Adato's (2007) mixed-methods study on assessing conditional cash transfers in Mexico. To some extent, policymakers tend to put greater weight on statistically representative 'large sample' assessments than on a small number of case studies, and indeed, the quantitative part of the appraisal was both statistically representative and addressed econometrically the difficulties in attributing causality to the programme from 'before and after' or 'with and without' comparisons. It is generally accepted that the quantitative assessments of Mexico's conditional cash transfer programme played a key role in convincing a new administration to continue a programme started by the previous administration.

However, Adato's (2007) qualitative assessments throw up key issues which policymakers and analysts ignore at their peril. For example, while the quantitative assessments have generally praised these programmes for being well-targeted to beneficiary groups, and indeed have recommended tightening up of monitoring to reduce what leakage there is, the qualitative assessments reveal a great deal of incomprehension and resentment on the ground by those left out of the beneficiary group when they see their near neighbours being included. The tensions caused by such factors, identified as being serious in the qualitative assessment, could undermine support for the programme.

The benefits of 'Q-squared' – combining quantitative and qualitative approaches – are thus not to be doubted, and are revealed in a large number of recent studies. Q-squared approaches can include conducting studies side-by-side, or making quantitative studies a little more qualitative (for example, by conducting a participatory appraisal prior to designing the survey questionnaire, or by adding an unstructured portion at the end of a questionnaire), or by making the qualitative studies a little more quantitative (for example, by choosing the sites for the qualitative assessment on the basis of a national sampling frame, or by generating numerical values from coding of the unstructured interviews). Further, as Harriss (2002: 494) says, 'disciplines need to be saved from themselves.' Effective cross-disciplinarity seeks to capture the 'productive' aspects of disciplinarity which 'produces the conditions for the accumulation of knowledge and deepening of understanding' while avoiding the 'constraining' effects of disciplinarity which can lead 'to the point where it limits thought …and even [becomes] repressive' (Harriss, 2002: 487-8).

However, this is not to say that there are no problems. There remain fundamental issues of discipline and epistemology that will not simply go away. While Kanbur and Shaffer (2007b) come out strongly in favour of mixed methods, they caution that there are pitfalls of which we should be aware. For example, different conceptions of the nature of knowledge in different disciplinary traditions, and whether poverty can and should be identified 'objectively' by 'brute data', or whether it is inherently to do with inter-subjective meanings, are bound to bedevil 'deep integration'.

The above discussion applies to poverty analysis in general. Consider now an application of the above discussion to poverty dynamics in particular. How can we gather the empirical data necessary to analyse dynamics, and how can we theorise the role time plays in poverty processes?

Methods to capture time in poverty analysis

- **Panel data methods** are considered the most reliable by virtually all quantitative researchers and by many qualitative researchers. These involve conducting questionnaire surveys or semi-structured interviews with the same individual or household at different points in time, permitting objective data to be collected for key measures and about the ways in which the individual/household explain the changes that are occurring in their lives. The strengths of this method are its rigour and the comparability of the data it collects at different points in time. Its disadvantages are its costs, the significant delay in analysis that it entails, interviewee fatigue, matching households in large datasets and systematic sample attrition.

  If the object is to take a medium term perspective on time, and especially if we wish to take a longer, intergenerational or dynastic, perspective, then panels of 20 years or more are needed by definition. There has been a recent flowering of panel data set collection in a few developing countries, and is increasingly effectively used to analyse poverty and wellbeing dynamics (see Quisumbing (2009). However, a majority of developing countries do not have panel data at all, certainly not of the nationally representative variety, and no countries have comparable panels of over a generation. Quantitative panel based analysis on poverty dynamics, therefore, is largely an analysis of fairly short run fluctuations in wellbeing and poverty, for the small number of countries that have them.

- Given the difficulties of collecting panel data it is logical to seek to identify **'one off' indicators** (i.e. measures collected at a single point in time) that provide information about poverty duration. The most obvious type of indicator for this purpose are 'nutrition' orientated – on the grounds that certain nutritional measures reveal what has been happening to an individual over an extended period of time. Researchers who have adopted this approach have favoured child stunting as a measure indicating that a child has been undernourished for an extensive period of time and, by implication, that her/his household has been poor for an extended period of time as it has been unable to provide an adequate diet. The great advantage of this method is that it permits low cost and rapid, if partial analyses of poverty dynamics for any population for which an anthropometric survey is available. The severe challenges include accuracy of data on height and age; the assumption that stunting is caused by under-nourishment rather than other factors; and the difficulty of moving beyond stunting.

- Another means of avoiding the costs and delays of collecting panel data is through ***retrospective data*** – asking interviewees to provide data about their past circumstances at the same time as they are providing data about their present condition. This can be undertaken in both quantitative surveys (e.g. Quisumbing (2009) and qualitative approaches. Many researchers are highly suspicious of this retrospective data method because of the well-known problems of recall. As a result, many researchers do not regard this as a credible method for collecting quantitative data. It is used extensively to collect qualitative data, often to triangulate other data, and/or to understand the ways in which people subjectively interpret change over time.

  By providing contextual and historical detail, life histories, which involve engaging each individual in a semi-structured discussion about their life course, constitute a valuable complement to quantitative approaches. Some quantitative information can be collected, but the main focus is on the narrative and interpretation of the narrative. Further, if a panel based survey is, say, every few years – the case for most panels in developing countries – then major twists and turns in the life course will be missed in the panel except to the extent that they are reflected in the next snapshot of the household or the individual several years later. Such events can be picked up in a life history discourse and put to good analytical use.

  Davis (2009) demonstrates their ability to reveal phenomena concealed by other methods, including: events with multiple causation; 'last straw' threshold effects (the culmination of a series of adverse trends); outcomes based on the ordering of a sequence of events; and events associated with household breakdown which tend to be masked in household survey approaches. For rural Bangladesh, Davis finds that most improvements tend to only happen gradually, whereas declines are often more sudden, and jagged 'saw tooth' trajectory patterns are more common among the poor than smooth paths. The very richness of life histories means that the number of cases studied is generally small, limiting generalisation across larger populations.

  Whereas Davis focuses on one country (Bangladesh), Krishna (2009) tracks households in five countries. He aims to capture poverty dynamics through the 'stages of progress' methodology: a representative community group collectively defines poverty in terms of 'stages of progress': 'If a poor household gets a bit more money, what do they do with it?' Typically they specify food for the family as their first priority. The group then define 'X years ago' in terms of a well-known signifying event, and proceeds to categorise all community households in terms of each household's stage at the present time and X years ago. Finally, researchers using this method take a random sample to ascertain reasons for change or stability.

The papers in Kanbur and Shaffer (2007a) bear ample testimony to how far things have come in terms of adopting Q-squared approaches and cross-disciplinarity in studies of 'static' poverty. The papers in the 2008 CPRC volume, however, show how far we have to go in poverty dynamics in advancing mixed methods approaches. As a collectivity the papers do highlight the benefits from combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, as discussed above. However, except for Moser and Felton (2009), Boyden and Cooper (2009), and Woolcock (2009), the papers are largely in one tradition or the other. Indeed, Moser and Felton present an interesting amalgam of qualitative and quantitative approaches, combining relatively standard quantitative information with ethnographic detail and long term engagement with the urban Ecuadorean communities studied. It is hoped that the lead given by these papers, and by recent papers such as Baulch and Davis (2007) and Lawson (2007) will foster in poverty dynamics the trend that is already well underway in the static analysis of poverty.

Advances and challenges in measuring poverty dynamics

As discussed above, time adds novel and irreducible dimensions to the conceptualisation, measurement and understanding of poverty. While the introduction of time into the economic theory of poverty measurement is relatively recent, the current economic literature on poverty measurement is highly concerned with time-related issues such as defining and separating out transitory poverty and chronic poverty, and risk and vulnerability (e.g. Elbers and Gunning, 2006). Several papers included in the 2008 CPRC volume *Poverty Dynamics: Measurement and Understanding from an Interdisciplinary Perspective* represent the state of the art in this regard.

For example, Foster (2009) has attempted to incorporate duration of time spent in poverty into the FGT (Foster, Greer and Thorbecke, 1984) poverty measures – the most widely used poverty measure of the last two decades. Applying the duration-adjusted FGT measure to an Argentinian panel, Foster finds a significantly different estimate of poverty, with a large spatial variation in chronic poverty. The next step, Foster notes, is to create multi-dimensional, duration-adjusted measures of chronic poverty, but this is an exceptionally demanding task (not least in making commensurate the different dimensions of wellbeing to construct a single measure). Notwithstanding, Foster's duration-adjusted FGT measure promises to revolutionise the measurement of poverty dynamics in the way that the original FGT measures transformed the measurement of static poverty.

Several key questions and issues emerge from those papers in the CPRC volume that investigated measurement issues. First, how do we incorporate **risk** and **vulnerability** into poverty measures – a major expressed concern of the poor – especially when we are concerned with identifying the probability of future poverty in a context where individuals do not have perfect foresight? Much effort has gone into incorporating these factors into static poverty measures, but the effort is only just beginning with dynamic measures.

Second, different individuals and groups will experience different patterns of spells of poverty and non-poverty; how is this information to be aggregated, if at all?

Third, it is clear that in order to derive satisfactory intertemporal measures we must be very clear about what underlying assumptions are being made. In particular, there is the difficult and contentious issue of **time discounting**. This refers to whether we should treat all spells of poverty equally and, if not, how should they be weighted? To what extent can a period in poverty be compensated by future higher income – a key question for assessing the poverty impact of policy reforms that often generate short-term adjustment costs with the promise of long term gains? Calvo and Dercon (2009) reject the notion of time discounting that prevails in other areas of economics where intertemporal welfare effects are being compared (e.g. in the cost-benefit analysis of environmental impacts), instead appealing to the principle of 'universalism': valuing distress equally whatever the time period in which it has occurred. They illustrate their discussion of these issues with a Ethiopian household panel dataset, finding substantial differences between static and intertemporal poverty measures.

Fourth, formal models to address the key question of 'who among the presently poor are likely to be poor in the future?' require an **assets-based theory of poverty traps** (Carter and Barrett, 2006). The methodology of assets-based approaches has become increasingly sophisticated and is panel data-intensive.

In the CPRC volume, Moser and Felton (2009) apply a principal components analysis to panel data from urban Ecuador (collected over 1978-2004) and construct an index to measure asset accumulation. The authors argue that it is imperative to understand the social context of assets and how they vary in their importance across time and space. Therefore, they inductively construct the index on the basis of longitudinal anthropological research, a methodology they term 'narrative econometrics'. The distribution of each type of capital is then calculated over different points in time to highlight asset shifts.

Drawing upon the recent literature on the role of assets in persistent poverty, Carter and Ikegami

(2009) introduce new theory-based measures of chronic poverty and vulnerability and illustrate their feasibility in a model applied to data from South Africa. They identify three types of poor people each with different future prospects: (i) the low-skilled with few livelihood possibilities, who are in a low-level equilibrium trap; (ii) a middle-ability group that will move either up or down the income scale depending upon their initial asset level; and (iii) a high-ability group who can move out of poverty given enough time. The authors then calculate the percentage of people who will stay poor under different assumptions of asset dynamics. Asset shocks are simulated in this model, with individuals reacting to the risk of shocks by, for example, being unwilling to forgo present consumption in order to accumulate assets that they may well lose. Different policy recommendations are developed for each group, with social protection the best option for the first group, while the middle-ability group need protection to reduce their risk and asset transfers to put them over the asset threshold and give them a fighting chance of exiting poverty.

Advances and challenges in understanding poverty dynamics

Two chapters draw on recognisable economic/ quantitative frameworks to theorise chronic and intergenerational poverty. A key assumption in existing models is that individuals cannot borrow against their future earnings to build present assets (which in turn yield higher (future) income flows) and must save instead. A threshold of initial assets exists below which accumulation through saving is not a viable strategy for moving out of poverty and, with a binding credit constraint, an individual cannot become a successful entrepreneur – even if s/he has the skills and knowledge to do so.

Osmani (2009) develops a dynamic approach to capabilities: people may develop or lose specific capabilities over time, and their opportunities are often changing as economic change favours some skills and downgrades others. Poverty traps for both households and individuals then result from a mismatch between the structure of endowments and the structure of opportunities. Osmani contrasts the roles of level and structure of assets/endowments in explaining chronic poverty. Osmani also takes a forward-looking approach to chronic poverty – someone will be in a poverty trap indefinitely unless something changes for the better. On this basis he develops a definition of chronic poverty with *expected* income as its core, with expected income in turn conditional on the expected accumulation of assets over time as well as initial exogenous circumstances. If that conditional expected income lies below the poverty line then that person is chronically poor. With limited endowments a person can be chronically poor without being caught in a poverty trap (for the fortunate their income may be on a time path to move them out of poverty even if they are chronically poor at present). For policy, it is then essential to look at the *pattern* of growth and not just its rate for the former restructures the pattern of opportunities, devaluing some initial asset investments while raising the returns on others (as will economic policy change, for example market liberalisation). Targeted interventions to improving endowments and putting people on upward accumulation paths out of chronic poverty must take account of the changing pattern of growth. Assets are also socially constructed and a mismatch between endowments and opportunities can arise when social relations, not just the economy, change.

Quisumbing (2009) focuses on human and physical capital in an analytical survey of how intergenerational asset transfers can create or block off escape routes from poverty. The poor are typically constrained in their ability to trade-off present for future consumption (exacerbated by credit constraints) and an inability to invest in human capital persists across generations. Quisumbing argues that context matters greatly in determining which assets work best for poverty reduction, particularly the gendered ownership and control of assets. Further, if asset accumulation takes time and is difficult for the poor, then assets at marriage largely determine lifetime prosperity. The marriage market therefore plays a central role, and *assortative mating* – whereby partnerships are formed between people of similar socio-economic backgrounds – can increase inequality and reduce social mobility due to intergenerational transfers at marriage, thereby continuing social stratification from one generation to the next. For the poor to transfer assets across generations they must first accumulate them; hence the need to strengthen property rights, reduce the initial costs of acquiring capital, provide savings instruments, and provide mechanisms to maintain assets in the face of shocks. More mechanisms for human capital investment by the credit constrained are essential.

Of course, measuring poverty dynamics is inextricably linked to how we understand it. Two chapters of the CPRC volume explicitly critique measurement approaches in order to advance understanding. Harriss (2009) argues that the focus on the 'scientific' measurement and on the characteristics of individuals and households has come at the expense of attention to the structural processes that move people in and out of poverty. Numerous studies identify the same set of factors (assets, household characteristics, demographics) as being associated with poverty dynamics, yet these are proximate factors only. This supposedly 'value-neutral' approach depoliticises poverty. A key but outstanding question is why the poor come to have so few assets, and the role of wealthy elites in blocking their asset-accumulation strategies (including historical and contemporary expropriation). Clearly, there is considerable scope for qualitative research to inform quantitative data collection in this area.

Du Toit (2009) emphasises the need to engage with the structural dimensions of persistent poverty and therefore with social relations, agency, culture and subjectivity, illustrating his argument with examples from South Africa. While welcoming the recent dialogue between quantitative and qualitative research, he emphasises the need to go beyond the positivist assumptions underlying econometric approaches which at their worst constitute a 'mystifying narrative' of what poverty means and how we come to understand it. Du Toit agrees with Harriss that the process of abstraction in poverty measurement results in a de-contextualisation of poverty; certain information (that which can be standardised and quantified) is given preference in building a narrative of the poor and the processes that result in impoverishment. By focusing on what is readily measurable at the individual and household level, measurement approaches neglect culture, identity, agency and social structure that are central to creating wealth and poverty, and the policy conclusions do not connect to the realities of poor societies.

Relatedly, Green (2009) argues that the 'mystery of capital' – who owns and controls assets – lies in social relationships; hence entitlements do not exist in the abstract but within fluid networks of moral relationships. Green argues that social ordering sanctions harm to some, but not to others, illustrating this point with an examination of witchcraft in contemporary Africa which is used to change relationships within and between families (including control over assets and the value attached to them). In Green's view the concept of 'chronic poverty' usefully highlights a situation but does not explain it, tending to yield frameworks that are far from local conceptions of poverty, and local concerns. To get deeper insights we need to develop the idea of *durable* poverty (based on deprivation) rather than chronic poverty, for the former concept is better able to handle the institutional factors that keep people poor.

Woolcock (2009) highlights how the need for a broader social theory of chronic poverty must look to systems of social relations, rules and meaning. Thus understanding how groups are defined is key to a better understanding of the social relations that underlie chronic poverty. Rules systems, which constitute everything from constitutions and contracts to languages and social norms can lie at the heart of 'legal inequality traps' that condemn people to chronic poverty. A better understanding of 'meaning systems' (how people make sense of what happens in the world and to them) is essential to deepen our knowledge of chronic poverty since groups can sometimes subvert practices perceived by outsiders as in their best interests. A clear model of human behaviour beyond micro-economics is needed; better explanations of why poverty persists as part of broader processes of economic and social change; more insight into how power is created, maintained and challenged; and more attention to how we can best learn from the new generation of poverty reduction policies and practices. Woolcock illustrates his argument with cases from Australia, Cameroon, and China. Each of these cases shows how social relations are central to understanding responses to economic and social change. Fundamentally, Woolcock argues for a shift away within social theory from what he terms 'endless critiques' and yet more 'conceptual frameworks' and a more constructive engagement with the most pressing and vexing concerns around chronic poverty.

Finally, Boyden and Cooper (2009) address the increasingly popular concept of 'resilience' in research and practice around child, life course and intergenerational poverty. For reasons of physical and social vulnerability, children are more susceptible to the effects of poverty than adults, particularly to the effects of undernutrition. At the same time, they are agents with some capacity to 'bounce back' from many forms of deprivation. Thus, increasing attention has been paid to the issue of the extent to which children can overcome initial disadvantages such as poverty or exposure to violence. Boyden and Cooper argue that while superficially attractive, the resilience concept has not yet proved to be a useful tool for poverty research. It lacks a satisfactory definition, is impossible to observe directly, and disguises the multivariate phenomena in operation – structural processes as well as environmental and genetic impacts. Static models of human development often underpin the conventional wisdom on the effects of deprivation in early childhood, whereas more dynamic approaches are called for in which child development trajectories are constantly modified.

This research summary was written by Karen Moore

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The **Chronic Poverty Research Centre** (CPRC) is an international partnership of universities, research institutes and NGOs, with the central aim of creating knowledge that contributes to both the speed and quality of poverty reduction, and a focus on assisting those who are trapped in poverty, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

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University of Sussex, UK

Contact:
Julia Brunt,
CPRC Programme Manager
j.brunt@odi.org.uk

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