Realising poverty in all its dimensions:

A six-country participatory study

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The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute the core component of the 2030 Development Agenda adopted in 2015 by the 193 countries of the UN General Assembly. Designed to replace the Millennium Development Gaols (MDGs), they were the product of an extensive consultation exercise and, unlike the MDGs, apply to all countries rather than to just those in global South. It is officially recognised that, of the 17 goals: 'eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development' (United Nations, 2019, p.1). However, poverty in all its dimensions has never been formally defined. Target 1.2 and Indicator 1.2.2 merely repeat the phrase 'poverty in all its dimensions' with the addition 'according to national definitions' that, in effect, devolves ownership and responsibility to nation states. There is a need to develop a clear definition as a basis for meaningful comparison and to enable the concept of multidimensional poverty to be mainstreamed in policy development and measurement.

With this deficiency in mind, the results of a six-country study that sought to identify all the dimensions of poverty are presented below. The approach to defining dimensions took literally the aspiration of SDG Target 16.7, namely 'to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels', by engaging people in poverty in all stages of the research by ensuring their significant representation in national research teams. The methodology, termed Merging of Knowledge, entailed recruiting persons experiencing poverty as respondents, their participation in extended group work to specify the dimensions of poverty, parallel groupwork with specialist academics and social welfare practitioners with the same goal and, finally, a 'meeting of minds' between representatives of all three groups to seek, if possible, consensus on the dimensions of poverty. Consensus was achieved at national level as was consensus involving

representatives from all six countries, resulting in the specification of nine dimensions of poverty common to all six countries.

The remainder of the article divides into four. First, it is acknowledged that Target 1.2 reflects a shift in thinking away from conceptualising poverty in uni-dimensional terms as simply a shortfall in income. This turn towards conceiving poverty as multidimensional is briefly described before secondly, specifying, in some detail, the novel methodology employed that sought to overcome the disempowering effects of poverty that serve to silence the voices of people with direct experience of poverty. Third, each of the dimensions is then discussed drawing on illustrative quotations from the fieldwork before identifying five factors that serve to modify the manifestation of the dimensions in particular circumstances. In synthesising a complex international study based detailed fieldwork, telling details have necessarily to be omitted to focus on the key points of international learning; the detail, can be found in the six national reports (ATD Fourth World Tanzania, forthcoming; ATD Fourth World UK, 2019; ATD Fourth World USA, 2019; Bendjaballah et al., 2019; Boyer et al., 2019; Broxton, Charvon and Meyer, 2019; Khan, Rahaman, and Khan, 2020). The article ends with conclusions and reflections.

Poverty: on the idea of multidimensionality

While poverty may perhaps always have been conceptualised as multidimensional, it has very often been measured by 'deficiency in income' alone (Bedük, 2019). The World Bank's measure of poverty, introduced in 1990 and now based on the average poverty thresholds of the 15 poorest countries, is still the dominant measure used in development. Originally set at $1/per day, it was uprated to $1.25/day in 2005 and to $1.90 in 2011, the middle figure being used to underpin SDG Target 1.1 established in 2015.

Despite the dominance of income measures, the complex nature of poverty has long been recognised. Seebohm Rowntree (1908, pp. 297-8), a pioneering poverty researcher in the

UK much associated with income definitions of poverty, was certainly well aware of the complexity of poverty noting how his enumerators were often able to assess poverty on the basis of 'external evidence' of the multiple observable facets of poverty making 'verbal evidence superfluous'. The World Bank, as long ago as 2001, citing the then newly published *Voices of the Poor* global qualitative study (Narayan, Chambers, Shah and Petesch, 2000), noted that poverty was, 'for poor people', more than lack of income, being hungry, lacking shelter and clothing, suffering sickness and being 'illiterate and not schooled'. In addition:

> Poor people are particularly vulnerable to adverse events outside their control. They are often treated badly by the institutions of state and society and excluded from voice and power in those institutions. (World Bank 2001, p. 15),

However, for reasons we indicate below, it was not until 2018 that the World Bank sought to operationalise a measure of multidimensional poverty, (World Bank, 2018).

In development discourse, it is hard to overstate the influence of Amartya Sen first, his identification of poverty with multiple injustices and constraints on the full expression of capabilities, and secondly his role in advancing the Human Development Index (Haq, 1999; Sen, 1983, 1985; Stanton, 2007). The latter ranks countries in aggregate according to their achievements with respect to life expectancy and educational attainment as well as per capita GDP and was later accompanied by the Human Poverty Index which lists national failures with respect to three similar dimensions.

Some would argue that Sen focussed on well-being rather than poverty per se (Bourguignon and Chakravarty, 2003; Townsend,1985) but this was true of neither Ravallion (1996) nor Bourguignon and Chakravarty (2003) in two landmark papers in economics. The first argued that indicators of four dimensions were necessary for a satisfactory measure of poverty: expenditure on market goods, access to non-market goods, intra-household distribution; and personal characteristics imposing constraints on individual abilities. The second provided a

formal and axiomatic approach to combining individual scores and poverty gaps on various dimensions into a measure of multidimensional poverty which, in turn, stimulated Alkire and Foster (2011) to offer a practical operationalisation of multidimensional poverty: the MPI (Multidimensional Poverty Index). Following a review in 2005, Brazil introduced a multidimensional measure largely based on access to different services in 2010, the same year in which the MPI replaced the HPI under the auspices of the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) and which is now available for over 100 countries (Alkire and Jahan, 2018). However, the ten indices employed in the MPI relate essentially to the same three dimensions as the HPI: (education, health and living standard) that were themselves negative reflections of dimensions of national wellbeing. The MPI is nevertheless an important advance over the HPI in that it is based on household level data rather than national aggregates and can be decomposed to provide estimates of poverty for sub-groups of national populations.

The MPI excludes dimensions that many consider to be important. Tomlinson, Walker and Williams (2008) for example, using data from the UK, empirically identified four dimensions: financial pressure comprising financial strain (the difficulty of making ends meet) and material deprivation (the product of long-term financial hardship); psychological stress (anxiety, depression, lack of confidence and social dysfunction); and social isolation combined with lack of civil participation. Their recognition of psycho-social dimensions of poverty has subsequently been repeatedly validated (Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2015; Fell and Hewstone, 2015). Most directly, Tomlinson et al.'s work has been critically evaluated by Webb (2019), who repeated the analysis with recent data and more sophisticated analytic techniques to conclude its continued validity with the provisos that low life satisfaction emerges as a distinct dimension while social isolation does not, possibly due to measures that confound isolation with social exclusion. Bedük's (2018) analysis of poverty in 29 European countries, in contrast, postulated and found that limited ability to engage in social relationships and leisure was confirmed as one of four dimensions

alongside lack of basic needs, 'habitancy' (precarious housing circumstances) and inability to afford health promoting services and behaviour.

Psycho-social dimensions have similarly emerged in a development context whenever relevant variables have been included in the analysis (Gubrium, Pellissery, and Lodemel, 2013; Roelen, 2017; Wagle, 2008), seeking to emulate Sen but with empirical data, identified five dimensions in Nepal comprising capability, economic well-being and economic, civic and political inclusion. Los Rios and Los Rios (2010), in Chile, similarly found improvements in the coherence of the poverty definition by adding new dimensions including shame which increased the MPI poverty incidence by around 11 per cent, (dis-)empowerment by about 19 per cent and violence by 21 per cent. Working in South Africa, Ntsalaze and Ikhide (2018) did not include psycho-social dimensions but discovered that over-indebtedness and unemployment, both shown in other studies to be major sources of stress, needed to be added to the MPI to enhance its validity. Also in South Africa, Fransman and Yu (2019) note the association of poverty with physical and social isolation and with feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness and helplessness but fail to measure them, while (Bessell, 2015; Wisor et al., 2015) included lack of voice, violence and family relations in the Individual Deprivation Measure, a gender sensitive tool developed from fieldwork in Southern Africa and in Fiji, Indonesia, the Philippines, Angola, Malawi and Mozambique. OPHI in 2007 initiated work on missing dimensions suggesting the need to capture quality of work, empowerment, physical safety, social connectedness and psychological well-being (OPHI, 2019). And, possibly most significantly, the World Bank in 2018 experimentally added security, measured by crime victimisation and personal experience of natural disasters, although not the 2001 suggestions of disempowerment and vulnerability, to its new multidimensional measure of poverty.

As the list of dimensions has expanded, longstanding debates have been reignited about whether low income is integral to the very experience of poverty or merely a convenient indicator of other deprivations intrinsic to poverty (Ringen, 1988). The World Bank

includes income in its 2018 multidimensional measure while the MPI excludes it because of data availability (Alkire, Kovesdi, Mitchell, Pinilla-Roncanci, and Scharlin-Pettee, 2019). Ferragina, Tomlinson and Walker (2013) report its effect being captured by financial stress, while many countries in Latin America choose to exclude it on the grounds that it indexes a specific 'kind' of poverty requiring particular forms of policy intervention (Santos, 2019).

Beyond the choice of dimensions, there is contention as to whether poverty should be conceived as the sum of its dimensions or whether the dimensions are all related to, or correlated with, an underlying phenomenon of poverty. If the latter, then only a limited number of dimensions need to be considered to determine the poverty rate. A related but distinct issue is whether multidimensional poverty is a union or simultaneity phenomenon: for an individual to count as 'simultaneity poor' they must be poor on all dimensions whereas to be 'union poor' they need only to be poor on one dimension (Dotter and Klasen, 2017). Much discussion of this distinction has focused on practicalities, especially the fact that the union approach generates much higher estimates of poverty rates than one based on the concept of simultaneity. The MPI is a compromise in this regard since it requires a 'double cut-off', that is, a poverty threshold for each indicator and a second threshold relating to the number of indicators deemed necessary to count as multi-dimensionally poor. These complexities aside, it is conceptually important to understand whether or not poverty is unidimensional. The MPI is ambiguous in this regard since it is possible to be counted as poor on a single dimension if someone scores below the cut-off on each composite indicator while a person can be deprived on one or more indicators and not be considered poor. The reality of poverty, suggested by ethnographic and other work (Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2015; Duerr Berrick, 1995; Narayan et al., 2000) is that a failure to fulfil any one need necessarily has implications for other aspects of life such that poverty is

inherently multidimensional, falling between union and simultaneity conceptions: if poor on one dimension, a person is likely to be poor on other, if not all, dimensions.

The studies cited above are either axiomatic, stemming from prior assumptions about the nature of poverty, or non-axiomatic, derived empirically from data (Dotter and Klasen, 2017; Grynspan and López-Calva, 2011). Unfortunately, theory is too weak and contested to generate satisfactory axioms, while data-driven analyses are constrained by inadequate data deriving from multipurpose surveys or weak axioms (Bedük, 2019). A potential resolution of this conundrum is provided by Wresinski (1989) who argued both that extreme poverty is a violation of human rights and that only people enduring poverty know what it means to live in poverty. Without their insights, axiomatic and data driven definitions necessarily reflect 'top-down' formulations of the problem, ones arguably shaped by the interests of the 'haves' rather than the 'have nots'. By combining the perspectives of people experiencing poverty with those of informed others, notably researchers and welfare employees who need to respond professionally to the circumstances and needs of people experiencing poverty, Wresinski (1980) offered an alternative epistemological approach to defining the dimensions of poverty.

Wresinki's arguments led to the adoption of the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights by the UN Human Rights Council in 2012 (Godinot, 2012) that affirm the need to:

> ensure the active, free, informed and meaningful participation of persons living in poverty at all stages of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of decisions and policies affecting them. (CHR 2012, p.10)

Deliberative participation is itself fundamental, a right necessary to ensure that judgements reflect the common good rather than sectional interests. Moreover, as Sen (1995, p.402) has argued, participation is legitimate and necessary in scientific endeavour as well as within the political realm:

> ...scientific reasoning need not, of course, be based on observational information from one specific position only. There is need for what may be called 'trans-positional' assessment – drawing on but going beyond different positional observations.

Methods: making deliberative participation real

Given the lack of agreement over the nature and content of multidimensional poverty, the case has been made above to identify the dimensions of poverty though a deeply participative methodology that enables the genuine co-production of knowledge. The extensive literature on participatory research approaches espouses a dual aspiration towards empirical rigour and ethical, transformative – even emancipatory – practice (Khanlou and Peter, 2005). It also proposes that the top-down interpretive hierarchy can be overcome through, for example, participation throughout the entire research process from design to analysis, using techniques that enable inter-subjective dialogue between participants and processes to contrast interpretations (Flecha, 2015b p.11).

The study design was informed by the joint principles of equity and full citizenship which find their expression in the Merging of Knowledge methodology originallydeveloped by ATD Fourth World with academics and practitioners from France and Belgium (Bray and Bhallamudi,in process; FW-URG, 2007; Wresinksi, 1980). The underlying premise is that knowledge born from lived experience differs from that arising from either professional experience or from academe and that each is equally valid. Developing ideas drawn from symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), it is postulated and regularly found that, through sustained interaction with others, participants engaged in Merging of Knowledge are enabled to identify their own interpretations of the world and to modify them considering new information. Consequently, meaning derived through this process of co-construction will be qualitatively different from any derived from the sum of individual perspectives.

The upshot of two years' deliberation to adapt Merging of Knowledge for use in international research was a guided process of data collection, analysis and dissemination to be replicated in all six countries (Bray, de Laat, Godinot, Ugarte and Walker, 2019). The process extended the pioneering Wisor et al. (2015) study, which engaged people in poverty as partners in data collection, to embrace them in all stages of the research together with other groups, academics and practitioners, with a demonstrable knowledge of poverty. National Research Teams (NRTs), comprising four to six members with backgrounds in poverty, two to four academics and practitioners and two facilitators/coordinators, were constituted in Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the USA. The six locations were chosen to maximise diversity among countries in which ATD Fourth World and Mati (a Bangladeshi partner) had capacity to mount research and a long-term presence and local trust which aided outreach to the most marginalised groups (Bray et al, 2019). Guided by a framework agreed by representatives of the national teams and an international coordinating team, each country had considerable autonomy in achieving the sampling criteria, choosing techniques to facilitating dialogue on poverty within peer groups and engaging relevant stakeholders in their findings.

Each NRT pursued a five-stage process to collect data in each country. First, outreach required the identification and recruitment of people in poverty, academics and practitioners to participate in the second stage, comprising detailed discussions within peer groups to exchange personal experiences then collective work to specify the dimensions of poverty. Outreach sought to include people in poverty who would be missed by surveys and often included recruitment through civil society organisations and their contacts. Each NRT succeeded in establishing between 13 and 38 peer groups in both urban and rural areas involving an overall total of 665 adults and children in poverty (61.4%), 262 practitioners (23.5%) and 164 academics (15.1%). Peer groups of people in poverty generally met repeatedly, or for two or three consecutive days, for 14 or more hours, whereas groups of academics and practitioners tended to meet for much shorter times, occasionally for just half

a day. Similar, stimuli were used in all groups including photo-speak, body mapping, word synonyms and antonyms to identify the content of poverty, followed by open and closed card sorting and pairwise comparisons to build dimensions.

Thirdly, appropriate members of each NRT merged dimensions generated by their respective peer groups and the resultant three sets of dimensions were then merged into a single national set of dimensions by the NRT as a whole. Fourthly, these combined sets of dimensions were presented back to representatives from the previously convened peer groups for discussion and elaboration; this process of identifying consensus, difference and thus dimensions occurred in Merging of Knowledge events lasting 2-3 days. Dimensions were typically ranked according to varying definitions of importance and thought given to the nature of the relationships between them. Some 280 people took part in these Merging of Knowledge events with a total of 71 dimensions being specified across the six countries.

Finally, 32 representatives from the six NRTs, people in poverty, practitioners and academics, met together with the international coordination team over a seven-day period to compare and contrast the poverty dimensions identified by national teams. Working initially in two groups focussing respectively on countries from the global North and South, and then in peer groups covering both North and South, agreement was reached on the content of dimensions that applied in all six countries. The final list was subsequently circulated to national teams for critique and comment to ensure that the international dimensions accurately reflect those found in the study countries.

Alongside a common structure underpinning work in each country, considerable time and money were spent in creating an environment based on empathy, mutual recognition, trust, reciprocity, and non-abandonment (Davies, 2014), thereby allowing research to be done without the barriers of judgment and subjugation. Investment of this nature is seen as a prerequisite in deeply participative work to create conditions for realising “the intersubjective relationship necessary for both researchers and social agents to share their

knowledge and identify actions that overcome exclusionary elements" (Flecha, 2015a p.6). National Research Teams ensured that all those less familiar with research settings had someone accompanying them to support, interpret and think with, should they wish. And, alongside ethical provision for informed consent and confidentiality, they set out codes of conduct including active listening, mutual respect and willingness to be self-critical (ATD Fourth World, 2012). These checks and balances are consistent with deliberative research approaches that facilitate exchanges between equals with divergent viewpoints towards a common conclusion. The differences are that Merging of Knowledge affords equal status to each group of knowledge-holders (rather than considering some as 'experts') and brings representatives from all groups together in a debate towards achieving consensus, instead of importing outside 'expert' knowledge for deliberation by those considered to have a lay perspective (Burchardt, 2014).

Results

Figure 1 presents schematically the nine dimensions of poverty recognised to exist in all six countries and the five factors that subtly modify the way that are expressed both within and between countries. The nine dimensions embrace all 71 national dimensions apart from two, 'Environment pollution and the effect of natural calamities' identified in Bangladesh but not found to be salient elsewhere which is captured by environment as a modifying factor, while 'beliefs around poverty and witchcraft' evident in Tanzania are embraced by the modifying factor, cultural beliefs. The diagram suggests the interrelatedness of all dimensions without attempting to differentiate their relative importance.

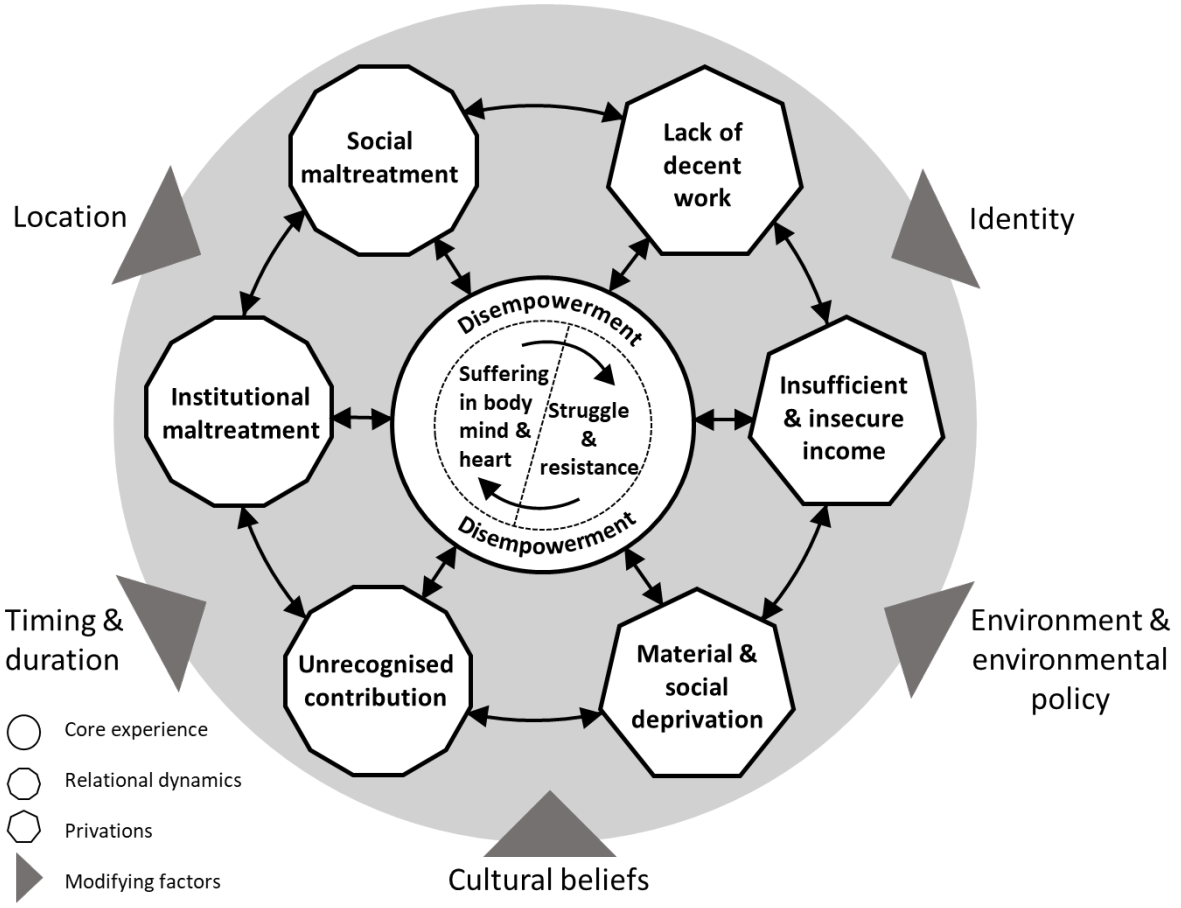

Figure 1 Dimensions of poverty

Revealing hidden dimensions

Three dimensions define the core of the poverty experience with 'suffering in body, mind and heart' at its centre. Participants were deeply committed to this three-fold characterisation arguing that poverty very often reflects and undermines physical and mental health while also affecting the emotions. Poor housing, inadequate diets, arduous and unsafe work environments all contribute to deteriorating physical health while cost often precludes preventive care or early access to health provision when available which often it is not. The challenges of making ends meet, of securing and holding onto adequate resources, of coping with crises and uncertainties that are magnified by lack of security, can all lead to stress and anxiety. So, too, can the necessary pretence that everything is fine and under control, the guilt of not being able adequately to care for loved ones and the shame of being poor,

dependent on others and always seeking favours. There is also the fear of what tomorrow might bring, the risk of being forcibly separated from ones' children, the possibility of homelessness and despair that circumstances seldom seem to get better. Frustration, fear, anger, depression are common emotions provoked by poverty that can be internalised and experienced as moving from the mind to the 'heart', reducing the sense of agency, lowering self-esteem, undermining self-confidence and reinforcing the sense of being left to cope alone.

It is always a judgement call whether to illustrate emergent concepts with quotations drawn from fieldwork. With hundreds of thousands of words collated from hundreds of settings underpinning this research, quotations cannot be definitive or fully representative. Nevertheless, it is necessary to underline poverty as suffering since existing measures are so distanced from this core concept:

> "Poverty means being part of a system that leaves you waiting indefinitely in a state of fear and uncertainty. Poverty kills dreams and cages the dreamers".
>
> People in poverty, UK

> "You can't get to sleep, you're thinking 'what can I do?'. What am I going to feed my children? You feel really bad; it hurts here inside".
>
> Person in poverty, Bolivia

> "The physical and mental problems related to poverty leave a person fragile and vulnerable. When people say their age, we are often surprised because their appearance suggested that they were older".
>
> Practitioner, France

The second core dimension, 'struggle and resistance' is the necessary counterweight to suffering and despair. People in poverty participating in the research were survivors, a product of struggle and resistance that enabled them to accommodate to, if not to

overcome, the pain of poverty. Struggle is necessary every day, whereas resistance is a positive response that is possible at certain times. Both aspects address not only the practical challenges created by poverty but the need to achieve 'an inner balance' that enables people to cope emotionally. Struggle entails the development and application of survival skills, skills that might be termed 'managerial' and 'executive' within a work environment: resource generation, financial or people management and leadership. In a poverty environment, people: do it themselves; make do; double up; re-purpose, find out; lend; borrow; pay back and much more.

Where possible, people in poverty tend to share what little they have. This can exacerbate personal shortages but may contribute to a sense of agency and well-being as well as potentially yielding benefits through reciprocity when things get even worse. It can also engender a collective sense of togetherness that acts as an antidote to the social isolation that can result from processes of social exclusion. Sometimes, this togetherness becomes a form of collective resistance: street cleaning, small group farming or even simply the planning of social gatherings to mark cultural events.

> "Sometimes I feel sad, I don't know where my next meal is going to come from, but when I think about my children, I gain energy, strength to find food for them. I hope that when they grow up, they will get out of this poverty".
>
> Person in poverty, Tanzania

> "If the state takes your child away because of poverty, what is left behind is immense suffering. The action is recognised, but not the suffering, nor what we do to continue, to overcome and to work together. These are two sides of the same coin".
>
> Person in poverty, UK

Disempowerment, the third core dimension, is experienced as a lack of control over most aspects of life. Events and circumstances constrain options and choices and people often find themselves responding to choices and instructions made by others, typically by people

with authority over them. The result is sometimes a sense of helplessness as if like a boat tossed on tempestuous seas; on other occasions it is the loss of dignity, even the feeling of being no longer human, that comes from the forced dependency on others. Lack of control engenders fear derived from uncertainty and creates a lasting sense of insecurity and inadequacy. Repeated unsuccessful attempts to take control can lead to a sense of impotence and futility, even an unwillingness to fight any longer. Having frequently been made voiceless, there is the risk of choosing to be voiceless, bringing with it a collapse in confidence and a sense of worthlessness. In seeking to engage in the research people in poverty, it was necessary to address these feelings and to reimport belief in the value of their ideas and in the possibility that they could help to effect change.

> "Poor people are powerless in society. They cannot raise their voice because they know nobody listens to them. Rich people control everything".
>
> Practitioner, Bangladesh

> "Poverty feels like a tangled web that you can never escape".
>
> Person in poverty, UK

The second three dimensions are all explicitly relational and implicate much of society in contributing to the negative experience of poverty. Institutional maltreatment refers to the common failure of public and private institutions to respond appropriately to the circumstances, needs and aspirations of people in poverty. This includes the limited voice allowed in decisions made by government or in civil society, a lack of access to law and justice, and a failure to listen that mirrors the sense of powerlessness felt by people living in poverty. Institutions frame public discourse about poverty and often reflect and amplify discriminatory attitudes instead of confronting them. They frequently fail to tackle poverty, to prioritise the needs of people in poverty or to adequately fund initiatives to alleviate poverty. Instead, people experiencing poverty are often treated without respect or as second-class citizens, feel heavily stigmatised, receive substandard provision and suffer the

consequences of persistent corruption. Frequently unable to access services as a right, they are subject instead to interrogation, conditionality, judgement and sanction with the result that support services become institutions associated with fear and punishment.

> "A person in poverty might even have a school to go to, but the question is: what quality of teaching are you going to get? The problem goes beyond families in poverty being unable to access schools. Government and wider society don't give them opportunities. They fail to offer quality services or show a sincere desire to help them escape from poverty".
>
> Academic, Bolivia

> "People no longer dare to go to the town hall because they are not well-received, they no longer want to go there to process administrative formalities".
>
> Practitioners, France

Social maltreatment is the informal counterpart of institutional maltreatment and simultaneously a consequence and a cause of it. It refers to the way in which people in poverty are typically treated within and by the community. Most often the public views people in poverty judgementally, readily willing to blame and stigmatise a group perceived to be a threat and/or a financial liability. The process of othering is commonplace in which people in poverty are thought to be different in kind and socially inferior, engaging in disreputable behaviour either as a cause or a result of their poverty. Social maltreatment is not confined to distant acquaintances but can occur within families when relatives experiencing poverty are shunned, on the presumption that will ask for money or else bring the family into disrepute. It happens in the school playground as children sort themselves into affluence groups, repeat stereotypes heard from parents and engage in bullying their peers, often those who are least affluent.

> "Here in the US, who you are is defined by what you have. When you have not much, you are not much. And then you are not treated like you belong".

Person in poverty, US

> "There is discrimination because we haven't got any money; we're not well-dressed; we haven't studied; we're not professionals; we don't speak properly".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

The failure to recognise the contributions made by people in poverty could be seen as an aspect of either social or institutional maltreatment. However, participants argued fiercely that it was an independent dimension characterising poverty, one that acknowledged a positive in the lives of people in poverty that was characteristically denied or ignored. People in poverty survive through their resourcefulness using initiative and skills acquired through their struggle to subsist. They often successively perform roles as parent and relatives and have social lives albeit constrained by lack of resources. Their lack of resources is usually not for lack of work but for lack of accredited skills that might enable them to secure well remunerated employment. They often occupy jobs unwanted by others at wages that effectively subsidise consumption by the more affluent. All these multiple contributions typically go unrecognised or are treated with indifference by society, indifference that can cause people in poverty to underestimate their own ability and skills.

> "The skills that are learned from experience by people living in poverty are not valued or considered marketable. In the economic sphere, people in poverty are considered and treated as disposable, and this creates uncertainty and instability in their lives".

Research team report, US

> "A farmer cultivates paddy and others crops for our country. If he didn't, then rich people would not get food easily. The hard work of farmers is a very important contribution for our country; yet we never give much respect to the farmer for his work".

The final three dimensions, ‘lack of decent work’, ‘insufficient and insecure income’ and ‘material and social deprivation’ are more familiar in scholarly and policy debates and touched on in some of the metrics already in use. Social deprivation embraces lack of access to affordable and quality health care and education included in the MPI but adds a range of other infrastructure resources including transport. Material deprivation encompasses lack of sufficient, nutritious food, basic utilities such as clean water and reliable energy supplies. These utilities together with quality housing with good sanitation could provide for the security and privacy that is so often denied people in poverty.

While inadequate income, less than necessary to meet basic needs and social obligations, was seldom the first dimension to be identified, agreed and discussed, participants nevertheless recognised its importance. Low income not only led to unmet need, hunger and ill-health, it drove indebtedness, often simply to cover basic needs, that in turn increased insecurity, created dependences and exposed people to exploitation. It could also mean children missing school to add to family incomes with long term and potentially intergenerational consequences. It was agreed that insecure income was also deeply problematic, preventing meaningful financial planning and systematic saving and encouraging ‘hand to mouth’ spending, spending money as it became available.

The final dimension couples work needed to provide the necessary resources to survive and provide for one’s the recognition that poverty is often characterised by unregulated, casual or self-employment that is often undignified and sometimes dangerous. People are

vulnerable to exploitation of many forms, failure to pay wages, dismissal without warning or explanation, sexual and physical abuse. Often people have to travel long distance in search of, or for work, with migration and living away from home bringing additional hardships.

In sum, the research identified a total of nine dimensions recognised as meaningful in all six countries.

Modifying factors

Perhaps because most of the attention paid to the dimensionality of poverty has been in the context of measurement, there has been little prior discussion as to how the dimensions find their expression. Starting from the perspective of lived experience, it became evident that undeniably the same dimensions differed subtly in specific contexts. As mentioned already, five broad factors seemed to modify the expression of dimensions. These are now briefly considered.

Identity proved to be very important, especially identities that attract discrimination and stigma: for example, race, ethnicity, migration status, gender and sexual orientation. People in poverty are often subject to discrimination on grounds of their lack of income; there is much truth in the epithet that a service received by people in poverty is a poor service and this is partly due to discrimination. When a person in poverty is identified with another stigmatised groups the stigma is cumulative, the phenomenon of intersectionality. In New York, an African American who is poor will face discrimination on the grounds of both race and poverty; they are likely to be treated late in the welfare queue, a manifestation of administrative maltreatment and also to encounter social maltreatment within their own African-American community (Ali, Ohls, Parker and Walker, 2018).

Location is another modifying influence justifying the decision to conduct the research in both urban and rural areas, although it is important to reiterate that the same dimensions were expressed in all six countries, despite the cultural influences which are identified as a further modifier. Two scenarios from Tanzania illustrate the complex interrelationships. In urban areas, violence against women, both within intimate relationships and beyond, is prevalent but disproportionately affects women in poverty. Living in or near violent neighbourhoods and needing to travel for work in antisocial hours, low income women are at risk of assault. Within intimate relationships, money shortages and the low status of males are known triggers of violence while poverty

means that women are more financially dependent with fewer routes of escape. In rural areas, violence is much less prevalent, but women are more susceptible and less able to resist early and forced marriages, often forms of income generation for extended families. In both kinds of location women are more prone to social abuse arising from assumptions about the worthlessness of people in poverty and both exacerbated by the powerlessness stemming from adequate individual resources.

The example from rural Tanzania also illustrates how cultural beliefs can shape the experience of poverty and the expression of particular dimensions. Culture, of course, defines many of the social expectations that define the opportunity sets and financial demands that people experiencing poverty need to negotiate. They define those expected to undertake paid work and who should engage in unpaid labour; who should receive assistance and in which circumstances and who should not. They determine the volume of public expenditure and the priorities that influence how much is spent on poverty prevention and poverty alleviation. Such resource allocation decisions are, in turn, shaped by presumptions about the causes of poverty and the role of government in addressing it. In France, for example, governments have long accepted the importance of structural determinants of poverty and sought, nominally at least, to need to construct support systems to protect those affected. The regime in the USA is very different affecting the nature and levels of suffering, disempowerment and institutional maltreatments:

> "America takes pride in describing itself as a land of opportunities where anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and achieve upward mobility. People are judged by the extent to which they have achieved the American Dream based on their material possessions and the ability to provide a better life for their children. These cultural assumptions foster a sense of failure and inadequacy for the more than 40 million Americans who live in poverty and are striving to better their families' lives without seeing results, most often for reasons out of their control". US research team report, 2019

The timing and duration of poverty also nuance the expression of poverty dimensions (Bray et al, 2019). Research with elders was undertaken only in Tanzania with very little difference in the dimensions identified but elders felt the lack of respect even more sorely given their lifetime contributions. Similarly, they felt their growing dependence on others more acutely than others, while the presumed inevitability of dying in poverty tended to lessen their commitment to struggling on, adding to their suffering. Exploratory research in Tanzania and Bangladesh suggested that there may be two child-specific dimensions to add to the other nine that were still in evidence. One related to fear of danger or abuse in the absence of protective care from family members who live elsewhere or are busy working. The other is the painful experience of sacrificing personal goals to meet the family's immediate needs, accompanied by extreme anxiety about one's future prospects.

A final influence was the environment including factors such as resource degradation, manifestations of climate change and the effects of pollution to which people living in poverty are often more exposed and less able to resist or avoid. In some rural areas, these factors were making traditional livelihoods riskier and income streams less dependable, adding to financial stress and struggle, while in urban areas especially, pollution was having a direct impact on health and suffering. Policy neglect of these issues might serve as examples of institutional abuse, given that their personal and social costs were disproportionately borne by people in poverty, the suspicion being that policy would have been more responsive had more affluent groups been more affected.

Conclusions and reflections

The findings warrant careful consideration. Not only do they have great face validity, shaped as they are by direct experience but mediated through exchange and negotiation with academics and practitioners on equal footing, they offer new insights into the meaning of

poverty. Moreover, for people with direct experiences of poverty and academics and practitioners alike, the experience of participating in the study proved transformative (Bray and Bhallamudi, forthcoming). At the time of writing, dissemination has taken on a life of its own as teams in each country design events and communication strategies for the general public and policy communities to be co-delivered by people of all backgrounds. Such processes are testimony to empowerment at individual and collective levels, and of the continuing dynamic linking learning and action found in 'transformative' participation (White, 1996; Cornwall 2008).

Turning to the substantive results, poverty is deemed to have nine dimensions, only three of which register in the MPI (Alkire and Jahan, 2018). Moreover, these dimensions were manifest in each of the six countries, drawn from both the global North and South, but in ways that were nuanced, modified or moderated by culture, identity, time, location and environment.

The three dimensions that participants considered to represent the core of poverty, suffering, struggle and disempowerment, draw attention to the pain and anguish experienced by people in poverty that has hitherto been missed by indicators and is lost in debates over poverty rates. While most people in poverty are victims of structural determinants beyond their individual control, many rejected the label for they are not without agency. Indeed, the suffering that participants insisted afflicted them in 'body, mind and heart' has a counterpart in the struggle necessary to survive, even to thrive, in the most adverse of circumstances. Words such as 'coping' and 'resilience' were frequently rejected; they smack of actions insisted upon by welfare authorities that paid heed neither to the fundamental dimensions of poverty nor to efforts already being made. Instead, participants settled on the concept of resistance, confronting and overcoming life's difficulties both individually and in concert with others, pooling resources, working together, sometimes acting politically. Such resistance is nevertheless constrained by the third core dimension: disempowerment. People's lives felt controlled

by others: lenders; bureaucracy; even other members of the family who offered help on their terms. Participants experiencing poverty often sensed that they were powerless, not listened to, overlooked by people and institutions alike. Disempowerment results from the six subsequent dimensions of poverty that constraini opportunities and choice but also explains why the dimensions persist in being so debilitating; disempowered, people are often unable to mediate their effects or greatly to lessen their negative impact. Suffering is therefore double: direct and, made aware of their powerlessness, indirect.

These three core dimensions resonate with ethnographic studies that concentrate on the lived experience of poverty (Booth, Leach and Tierney, 1999; Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2015; Edin, and Lein, 1997; Munger, 2002), while Los Rios and Los Rios (2010), Bessell (2015), OPHI (2019) and Fransman and Yu (2019) all stress the importance of powerlessness and/or lack of engagement in community institutions as a dimension of poverty. Interestingly, though, OPHI's (2019) suggested measures of social connectedness and wellbeing excepted, previous work has not sought to carry through into measurement the suffering and struggle which participants in this study see as intrinsic to the very nature of poverty.

The second three dimensions are, like disempowerment, inherently relational, implicating everyone in forging the experience of poverty. Social maltreatment is the routine dismissal by others on the grounds of being poor and, by implication, in other ways inadequate. Often experienced face-to-face, such interactions merely instance social norms and prejudice with people saying and doing offensive things unconsciously. Institutional maltreatment, which some respondents wanted to call abuse, is part of the same social ecosystem. Institutions both shape and reflect public opinion and personal behaviour in the framing, structure and delivery of policy. Often the problem of poverty is framed as the people in poverty being a problem which leads structures to be coercive and staff behaviour to be paternalistic, rude and/or dismissive.

Social and institutional maltreatment are already partially recognised in social policy literature as othering (Lister, 2004), shaming (Walker, 2014), social isolation (Fransman and Yu, 2019), scrounger-phobia and stigma (Baumberg, 2016), though rarely as explicit dimensions of poverty (but see Lister,2004). Acomparison with the Individual Deprivation Measure concludes that, although it captures these dimensions only indirectly through indices relating to violence, inadequate family relationships and family planning, this was most likely due to reliance on existing measures since both social and institutional maltreatment featured a great deal in the initial groupwork with people in poverty (Walker, 2019).

The third relational dimension, unrecognised contribution, is less frequently acknowledged in existing literature. Individually people in poverty need survival skills, hustling for and eking out resources, and contribute to society as parents, relatives, neighbours and friends. Structurally, poverty and the market economy keep wages low, adding to cheap consumption by the middle class, while low wages keep out-of-work benefits low, benefiting the taxpayer. Few survival skills are credited or accredited to the chagrin of people living in poverty who are mostly told that they are losers or lazy (Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2015).

The other three dimensions have directly to do with deprivation and readily map on to existing debates but with salient nuancing. Personal and household material deprivation is differentiated from social infrastructure, employment is variously seen as a domain of status, dignity or humiliation as much as a source of income, while the unpredictability of income that prevents planning compounds the negative consequences of low wages and welfare benefits.

The research not only adds new dimensions, it informs practical issues and some of the axiomatic debates. The dimensions straddle the global North and South raising the possibility that poverty may be viewed globally through a single perspective (Gurria, 2019).

Furthermore, to the extent that many of the dimensions are inherently qualitative, reflecting human emotions and sensations, they may when transformed into indicators be less susceptible to distortion caused by differences in levels of economic development and culture (Walker, 2019). Even without formal indicators, Figure 1 may be used as a template with which to frame the development of poverty alleviation policies and to evaluate their success. Multiple examples were collated during the research process of policies that failed people because they did not take account of all dimensions, while the dimensions informed an analysis of the relative merits of universality, means-testing and conditionality for UNICEF (Yang, Walker, Chen, and Zhang, 2019), and have been used explicitly to critique policies to combat child poverty in China (Walker, 2020). While Figure 1 is heuristic rather than definitive in linking all dimensions, the interconnectedness of dimensions was frequently discussed and illustrated by multiple attempts parsimoniously to map the interactions. Poverty appears to constitute all nine dimensions, each dimension affecting each other which suggests that poverty has both union and simultaneity characteristics. At national level, ranking exercises with respect both to those that make life most intolerable and those which should be addressed first, showed that it may be possible to assess subjectively the relative importance of the linkages shown schematically in Figure 1. This, in turn, could reveal the degree of simultaneity that attaches to poverty.

The research is also relevant to thinking about the intrinsic nature of poverty dimensions, existing measures having been criticised for combining as dimensions both causes and consequences of poverty. A similar causal story could be told from Figure 1 with lack of decent work determining low income leading to deprivation and hence to suffering; this is made worse through institutional and social maltreatment that cannot readily be challenged due to disempowerment created by the maltreatment and lack of recognition. What should be readily evident is that this causality is not entirely linear but recursive and may not in every case start with lack of decent work. Moreover, participants frequently argued that

such recursivity makes any distinctions between cause and consequence immaterial for the reality is that these dimensions are simultaneously experienced as poverty.

While these findings offer a novel perspective on defining poverty, much work remains to be done. While, the scope and intensity of the method, the care given to enabling people in poverty to speak and their supported interaction with academics and practitioners all add credence to the results, scholarship demands replication in other settings, and possibly the triangulation of methods. While large in terms of qualitative research, only hundreds not thousands of people were involved in the research which was conducted in just six, albeit quite dissimilar countries. It is reassuring, though, to note that similar dimensions have already been identified in China by academics using extended creativity groups with only people in poverty (Yang, Jiang, Ren, Walker, Xie and Zhao, 2020). Moving ahead, indicators need to be developed especially for the core and relational dimensions and the possibility of doing this is already being widely discussed with pre-piloting work well advanced in China (Walker, Zhao, Yang, L. and Xu, 2020). The moral logic, of course, points to developing measures in a similarly fully participative manner and ATD Fourth World is in discussion with OECD about the feasibility of this. There is also a need to ensure that information is collected that will enable the effect of modifiers on the experience of the dimensions to be assessed.

Thereafter, there are decisions to be taken as to the method of aggregation, the weighting of dimensions and the nature of the relationships between dimensions. When the dimensions are adequately measured it will be possible to test whether the complex relationships theorised to exist by participants in this project are replicated in a multivariate statistical space. In the meantime, it may be that certain of the dimensions are added to existing models using pre-existing aggregation algorithms.

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