Alternative Paths to Social Transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Case for Poverty Alleviation Programmes by the Poor

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Abstract

This paper reviews and synthesises the findings of studies on poverty alleviation in the DRC, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda to respond to two questions: why have some poverty alleviation programmes been more successful than others? What lessons for policy reform may be drawn from both *the successful and less successful programmes? The findings were that: poverty alleviation programmes were more successful where the targeted poor were involved in the definition of poverty; and that many poverty alleviation programmes were implemented among/for people who did not perceive themselves as poor, and these tended to be ineffective. The paper presents and synthesises these findings, with the conclusion that they demonstrate a case for an ideological paradigmatic shift in the political economy of poverty and social transformation in the global south – from relegating the poor as passive* consumers *of poverty alleviation programmes to appreciating them as partners in the design of the programmes.*

Key words: poverty alleviation, social transformation, sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract

Este artigo revê e sintetiza os resultados de estudos sobre a redução da pobreza na RDC, Quénia, Moçambique, Ruanda e Uganda para responder a duas perguntas: porque é que alguns programas de redução de pobreza são mais bem sucedidos do que outros? Que lições podem ser extraídas para a reforma política tanto dos programas bem sucedidos assim como dos menos bem-sucedidos? As conclusões foram as seguintes: Os programas de redução da pobreza foram mais bem sucedidos onde os grupos de pobres alvo foram envolvidos na definição de pobreza; e que os programas de redução da pobreza muitos deles foram implementadas entre/para as pessoas que não se sentiam a si mesmas como pobres, e estes tendiam a ser ineficazes.O artigo apresenta e sintetiza estes resultados, com a conclusão de que eles demonstram um caso de mudança de paradigma ideológica na economia política das análises da pobreza e exclusão social e transformação no hemisfério Sul do globo - relegando os pobres como consumidores passivos de programas de alívio de pobreza para passar a apreciá-los como parceiros na concepção dos programas.

Palavras chave: redução da pobreza, a transformação social, África Subsaariana

Introduction

In many Sub-Saharan African countries, social transformation is at the nucleus of the political economy of poverty. Defined as the process by which households *improve* their ascribed status, social transformation has also received notable attention from scholars, activists and non-governmental organisations in and outside the sub-Saharan region. Subsequently, there is an enormous and diverse body of literature on the subject. Paramount among the foci of this literature is the interplay between economics and politics; the policy options for social transformation that this interplay presents; and the implementation and outcomes of these policy options. Among others, this literature affirms two things that point to a need for *new* research on the political economy of poverty and social transformation in the region. First, it indicates that governmental, diplomatic, civil society and charitable organisations have invested heavily in poverty alleviation programmes in the region (see, for example, Moyo, 2009). Second, it indicates that many households are *stagnating* in extreme poverty, notwithstanding the fact that successive household welfare surveys have reported notable improvements in household welfare. These things bring the following questions to mind: 1) What explains the persistence of extreme poverty despite years of enormous investment in poverty alleviation programmes? 2) Why have some poverty alleviation programmes/projects been more successful in alleviating poverty than others? 3) What lessons may be drawn from *both* the successful and less successful programmes/projects for policy reform?

Review of the literature (e.g. Crook, 2000; Daxbacher, 2004; Dorr, 1992; Mehrotra & Delamonica, 2007) leads to the conclusion that, until now, these questions did not attract satisfactory scholarly attention. Rather, the literature occurs in three major categories: 1) poverty status reports, discussing the causes, nature, incidence and consequences of poverty (e.g. Abuka *et al*., 2007; Ayako & Katumanga, 1997; Bird *et al*., 2003; Deininger & Okidi, 2003a); 2) poverty alleviation programme/project reports, mainly narrative explanations of the performance of these programmes (e.g. Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development [MoFPED], 2001; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development [MoGLSD], 2003); and 3) commentary on poverty and poverty alleviation programmes, discussing aspects of the literature in the first two categories (e.g. Bansikiza, 2007; Due *et al*., 1990; Ellis & Bahiigwa, 2001; Johnson, 2004; Kisekka, 2011; Lawson *et al*., 2003; Muhumuza, 2007; Mukui, 2005; Nduhukhire-Owa-Mataze, 1999; Stevenson & St-Onge, 2005). Thus, a gap in knowledge on the political economy of poverty and social transformation in the region pertains to the fact that even though some of the authors in each of the categories of related literature make an indication of the reasons underlying the performance of individual poverty alleviation programmes, they do not synthesise multiple experiences to propound generic propositions that may be applicable across varied settings.

To plug this gap, this paper synthesises the findings from five studies of aspects of the political economy of poverty and social transformation conducted in the region between 2009 and 2012. Conducted by teams of researchers based at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), Université Catholique de Graben, Universidade Catholica do Mocambique and Universite Catholique de Kabgayi – under the auspices and technical guidance of the Centre for Coordination of Research of the International Federation of Catholic Universities – the studies respectively delved into: 1) Caritas' self-help and the government's revolving loan programmes in Kenya; 2) growth of a savings and internal lending community and the correlates of stagnation in and mobility from poverty in central Uganda; and 3) perceptions of poverty and poverty alleviation programmes in the DRC, Mozambique and Rwanda. The paper discusses the studies with the conclusion that, despite their diversity, two findings that are common to all of them are that: 1) poverty alleviation programmes/projects were more successful in instances where the poor at whom they were targeted were involved in the definition of poverty; and 2) many poverty alleviation programmes/projects were implemented among/for people who did not perceive themselves as poor, and these tended to be ineffective. Thus, the paper propounds a case for a paradigmatic shift in the political economy of poverty and social transformation in the region – from relegating the poor as passive *consumers* of poverty alleviation programmes/projects to appreciating them as partners in the design and implementation of these programmes/projects.

Lessons from Selected Successful and Unsuccessful Poverty Alleviation Programmes

The studies conducted in Kenya and Uganda examined four similar poverty alleviation programmes, but which succeeded in differing levels. In Kenya, the programmes were Caritas Kenya's Self-Help Programme and Government of Kenya (GoK)'s Revolving Loan Fund. On the other hand, in Uganda, the programmes were Nkozi Agribusiness Training Association (a Savings and Internal Lending Community) and the Uganda Government's Revolving Loan Fund Programmes.

Caritas Kenya's Self-Help Programme and GoK's Revolving Loan Fund

Kenya's vision 2030 underscores government's commitment to poverty alleviation through implementation of macro and microeconomic interventions that address the factors excluding the country's poor from gainful economic activities (GoK, 2007). Pursuant to this vision, the government is implementing a devolved fund – including a constituency development fund, poverty eradication revolving loan fund, water services trust fund, constituency bursary fund, free primary education fund, local authority transfer fund, disabled fund, HIV/AIDS community initiative account, community development trust fund, road maintenance levy fund and rural electrification levy fund (Centre for Governance and Development, 2007). According to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry of Finance (2011), for example, the poverty eradication revolving loan fund is aimed at providing the poor with access to the capital that they need to break their vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion. However, as in many parts of the global south where similar programmes have been implemented, the fund has not been as effective as hoped. Fears have been expressed that, in some provinces, it is not reaching the most deserving poor. For instance, a Centre for Governance and Development report faults the constituency development fund thus:

> The [constituency development fund] CDF is one of the popular initiatives in Kenya's development history and which has elicited greater debate on the potential of devolving resources to local development level. The implementation of the fund has however witnessed challenges relating particularly to issues of governance. In many ways, this has also affected monitoring and evaluation thus compromising the Fund's effectiveness and efficiency. According to the Fund's quarterly bulletin, the main challenges... revolve around operational issues of...formation of [constituency development committees] CDCs, types of fundable projects and procurement procedures...the major challenges facing the Fund are inequalities in constituency attributes...the Fund experiences gross data inadequacy...projects are also poorly chosen with those having widespread spill over benefits to some constituencies often being ignored. There seems to exist [sic] a 'fiscal illusion' that [the] CDF is free. This tends to de-motivate beneficiaries, especially in monitoring the Fund's efficient utilisation. In a number of instances, clear documentation has been noted in which politics plays a significant role in decision making in the Fund's management. Quite often, individuals and regions within the constituency that are supportive of the incumbent [Member of Parliament] MP often receive preferential treatment (Centre for Governance and Development, 2007. pp. 15-16).

Conversely, there are reports that Caritas Kenya (a charitable socio-economic development arm of the Kenya Catholic Bishops' Conference) is implementing a household self-help development programme that is comparable to the revolving loan fund component of the GoK's devolved fund, albeit the former is transforming the lives of the *very* poor in a cost-effective and sustainable way (see, for example, Murori, 2010).

A team of researchers based at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa delved into the design and implementation of the household self-help development programme – to gain insight into the factors responsible for its effectiveness. This was done following an ex-post facto design, through which the design and implementation of the programme were contrasted with those of the GoK's revolving loan fund, to highlight best practices in the design and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes (Lukwata *et al.*, 2012). Data was collected from managers and beneficiaries of the two programmes and from relevant documentary sources.

The findings were that Caritas' programme has been successful because: 1) it identifies the very poor through a participatory approach and limits its interventions to them; 2) involves participatory needs assessment and beneficiary capacity building; and 3) its interventions are tailored to individual beneficiaries' *felt* needs and resources (see Table 1).

Table 1: Attributes of Caritas' Self-help Programme and GoK's Revolving Loan Fund

Attribute	Caritas Self-help Programme	GoK Revolving Loan Fund
Focus	Poorest people as identified by local community and verified by Caritas field staff	All interested persons
Gender	Women	Men and women
Scope of activities	Participants' priority needs	Enterprise development
Funding	Participants' savings	GoK
Organisation	Informal, with rotational leadership	Formal, with more permanent leadership
Management	Participants, guided by their chosen management structure and Caritas field staff	Relevant local government and commercial intermediary
Rules and regulations	Guidelines agreed upon by participating persons and registered with relevant statutory authorities	Central and local government laws governing loan programme
Savings and repayment schedule	Tailored to participants' needs and capacity	Standardised
Assessment	Participatory assessment of resources and strengths at participants' disposal	Feasibility evaluation of enterprise proposal
Capacity building	Training in management of meetings, writing of by-laws, bookkeeping, conflict resolutions, savings mobilisation, borrowing and loaning	None

Source: Adapted from Lukwata (2012)

Table 1 shows that Caritas' self-help programme and GoK's revolving loan fund contrast in a way that the former is beneficiary-led. Caritas facilitates the *poor* participating in its development programme to identify and prioritise their needs and to identify and harness the resources (including social capital) at their disposal to meet these needs – a precursor to evolution of an effective loan mobilisation, utilisation and recovery incentive system.

Nkozi Agribusiness and Training Association and Government of Uganda's Revolving Loan Fund

It is noteworthy that the conclusion from the study of Caritas' programme corroborates evidence from a host of studies suggesting that interventions against poverty in whose design and implementation the poor play a prominent role tend to require significantly less financial investment and be more effective than those that do not. For instance, CRS (2010) reports that Savings and Internal Lending Communities in East Africa have not only succeeded in banking traditionally unbanked poor people but also mobilised phenomenal savings that have been loaned out to these poor with impressive recovery rates. Incidentally, in a number of instances, these communities have prospered while more heavily capitalised government and commercial credit schemes are failing in the same communities. Table 2 presents an example from Uganda.

Table 2: Growth of Nkozi Agribusiness Training Association (2010 to 2012)

Year	Groups	Men	Women	Total Number of Members	Total Savings (UGX)	Value of Loans
2010	53	226	605	831	3 923 900	0
2011	92	524	1 300	1 824	117 043 950	90 414 700
2012	286	1 987	4 365	6 352	567 153 310	444 282 850

Source: Nkozi Agribusiness and Training Association

Table 2 shows that from 53 groups, 831 members and USD 1 569/= in 2010, Nkozi Agribusiness and Training Association, a member-based savings and internal lending community in a rural county of central Uganda, reached 6 352 people who generated a turnover of USD 177 713/= albeit government of Uganda-sponsored revolving loan schemes implemented in the area failed (see, for example, Microfinance Support Centre, 2007; Mubiru, 2006; Ogwang, 2007).

Case for Poverty Alleviation Programmes by the Poor

The main lesson from the study of the critical success factors in Caritas Kenya's Self-help Programme and Nkozi Agribusiness and Training Association is that involving the poor in the definition of poverty and in the designing and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes could enhance the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the programmes. The inference here is that efforts to alleviate poverty should prioritise poor-people-led poverty alleviation programmes. This proposition and the findings of researches into stagnation in and mobility from poverty in Uganda and into poor people's perceptions of poverty and poverty alleviation programmes in the DRC, Mozambique and Rwanda underscore the need for poverty alleviation programmes by the poor.

Correlates of Stagnation in and Mobility from Poverty in Central Uganda

Study of the correlates of stagnation in and mobility from poverty in central Uganda addressed one main question: how come the poverty alleviation programmes that are enabling some households in the region to transit from poverty are not working for the households stagnating in poverty? (Ssempebwa *et al*., 2012). The rationale underlying the question comes from the persistence of poverty in many households in the region despite the benefit of decades of poverty reduction programmes. Review of related literature indicated that: 1) the meaning, causes and effects of poverty are not only diverse but also relative to context (in terms of *both* time and place); and 2) poverty in Uganda is linked to vulnerability, low levels of educational attainment, lack of income diversification, illness, regional imbalance, macro-economic bottlenecks, dysfunctional social practices, political instability, insecurity, displacement, gender disparity, corruption and indolence. The literature, including the country's poverty reduction strategy papers, affirmed that several governmental, private sector, charitable, civil society, religious, multi-national and diplomatic organisations are trying to address these factors and, at the household level, successive surveys have reported notable improvements in the quality of life (cf. Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2011). Notwithstanding, many households are still *stagnating* in poverty (Deininger & Okidi, 2003b; Johannes, 2005; Lawson *et al*., 2003; UBOS, 2011). In general, related literature links the stagnation to the causes of poverty enumerated above. Moreover, it has also been argued that the country creates more poverty (e.g. through war and bad governance) than it provides opportunities for transformation (cf. Collier, 2011). However, in a context where knowledge of the aforementioned causes of poverty has informed the design and implementation of interventions and some households are transiting from poverty despite the production of poverty at the macro-economic level, these factors do not seem to satisfactorily account for the stagnation.

Accordingly, the study attempted to account for stagnation in and mobility from poverty in the country – trusting that, although stagnation despite implementation of poverty alleviation programmes may not be surprising, accounting for it may enhance the effectiveness of the programmes. Data was collected from a random sample of 323 households – drawn from various parts of the country – using a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: household identification particulars; status of household (regarding wealth and poverty); and factors accounting for stagnation in or mobility from poverty. The questions on the status of households were structured as a scorecard aimed at creating a dichotomy of households *transiting* from and *stagnating* in poverty. They touched on attributes of access to healthcare, education, assets, clean water, sanitation facilities, income, food security, and land and quality accommodation – because related literature identified them as key indicators of social status in the area. The third section touched on the respondents' view of wealth and poverty, the status of their households regarding the two, and the things to which they would attribute this status.

The respondents' scores on the household status scorecard were computed into an index code named 'household welfare index'. The households were categorised as rural, semi-urban or urban, depending on the neighbourhood where they were located. For each of the categories, the mean score on the household welfare index was established and the households were further categorised into *transiting* from and *stagnating* in poverty thus: household's score on index ≥ category mean score on household welfare index = transiting; and household's score on index < category mean score on household welfare index = stagnating (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of Households by Status

Neighbourhood	Transiting	Stagnating	Total
Rural	71	79	150
Semi-urban	53	58	111
Urban	40	22	62
Total	164	159	323

Source: Ssempebwa et al. *(2012)*

The respondents defined wealth mostly in terms of access to the basic requirements of life, income and ownership of assets (Table 4).

Table 4: Meaning of Wealth (%)[1]

	Transiting			Stagnating		
	Rural	**Semi-urban**	**Urban**	**Rural**	**Semi-urban**	**Urban**
	n = 71	**n = 53**	**n = 40**	**n = 79**	**n = 58**	**n = 22**
Access to basics (food, shelter & bills)	59	42	33	40	39	64
Education	1	2	3	-	3	-
Good health	4	5	5	6	8	10
Income 1 (cash)	17	19	28	25	19	18
Income 2 (regular source)	15	13	18	9	7	5
Income 3 (diversified source)	3	9	5	3	7	27
Paid employment	4	8	8	9	10	9
Assets 1 (real estate)	30	36	40	29	43	55
Assets 2 (cars, phones, etc.)	15	17	3	8	10	5
Self-employment	-	-	8	3	7	9
Livestock	15	-	-	11	12	9
Social capital (children, relatives & friends)	3	-	3	1	5	5

[1] Multiple responses elicited
Source: Ssempebwa et al. *(2012)*

However, notable differences were established between the respondents' and researchers' characterisation of the statuses of the households (Table 5).

Table 5: Respondents' and Researchers' Characterisation of Households' Status

	Respondents' Characterisation of their Households				Total
		Rich	**Neither rich nor poor**	**Poor**	
Researchers' characterisation of respondents' households	Transiting	38	51	69	158
	Stagnating	30	25	101	156
Total		68	76	170	314

Source: Ssempebwa et al. *(2012)*

The main difference between the respondents' and the researchers' characterisation of the statuses of the households surveyed regarding wealth and poverty is that only a few of the respondents characterised as transiting from poverty concurred with the characterisation and vice-versa. Sixty-nine (representing 43%) of the respondents' scorecard characterised as transiting from poverty characterised themselves as being poor while 30 (representing 19%) of the respondents the scorecard characterised as stagnating in poverty characterised themselves as being rich. In accounting for the status of their households, some of the respondents provided reasons for this disparity (Table 6).

Table 6: Reasons Transiting Households Cited for Feeling Poor and Stagnating Households Cited for Feeling Rich

Thinking about wealth and poverty, where would you categorise your household among the two? Why?	
Transiting Households	**Stagnating Households**
• In between [poverty and wealth] because there is still a need for progress • Middle class...not yet there • Medium rich: transiting from poverty because the household head is working hard • Poor because [household head is] not in formal employment • Poor household because [they] have no assets • In between [poverty and wealth] because [the household is] working hard to deal with changes in the environment and prices • [A] poor household because a lot more is still desired • Middle class because [even if they] have achieved some things, more is yet to be achieved • ...in the middle because [they] still need other things • Poor [because] they have no car and animals [livestock] • Medium: I can't meet all my needs, however, I try to meet some [of the] needs • Midway between wealth and poverty because in as much as I am able to provide for my family, I am not very wealthy in terms of assets • I am moving toward riches because I have food, medical care, can pay [school] fees for my children...I am thinking of buying more land and I have a job so I am working • In between [poverty and wealth] because I can afford most of the daily needs though I still find it difficult in getting others [but] I am self-employed and hard working • In between wealth and poverty...though I have not invested much, I am able to attend to my family's needs and [I am] doing some investments • Poor because we lack a farm and [my] wife is not working	• Wealthy because I have a job • Wealthy because I have land • Not very poor, not rich because [I am] healthy and can work... [I] own a plot and a house • Moderate because gets food and shelter • I am rich because I have life • I am wealthy because I am attending school • I am in between the two because I can look after my family • Not poor because [I] can afford food, rent, etc. • [We are] wealthy because we have a plot [of land] • Rich because can self-support [sic] • Wealthy because [I am] working • Wealthy because [I] own a house and plot [of land] • Middle class because [I] can meet the basic needs • Rich because we can meet all our[basic] needs • At least I own a house; I do not consider myself poor • Rich because [I am] not renting • I am wealthy because I have developed good ideas through training • Rich because we are healthy • Rich because [we] can afford [our] needs • Wealthy because [we] have land for cultivation • Wealthy because is hard working • Wealthy because I am living [sic]

Source: Ssempebwa et al. *(2012)*

The respondents who characterised their households as transiting from poverty cited 12 factors for the transition (Table 7).

Table 7: Correlates of Transition from and Stagnation in Poverty[1]

S/N	Reasons for upward mobility	n	%2	Reasons for stagnation	n	%3
1	Education*	12	7	Low level/lack of educational attainment	5	3
2	Gainful employment*	29	18	Un/underemployment	43	27
3	Inheritance*	11	7	Inherited syndrome of disadvantage	3	2
4	Access to markets*	32	20	Lack of market	27	17
5	Frugality*	54	33	High [consumption] expenditure	58	36
6	Access to productive resources*	37	23	Lack of capital (money, land, etc.)	120	75
7	Social capital*	44	27	Social and political exclusion	16	10
8	Good health*	8	5	Sickness	33	21
9	Hard work	116	71	Livestock diseases**	24	15
10	Serendipity	11	7	Bereavement**	8	5
11	Mobility	5	3	Taxes**	35	22
12	Remittances	22	13	Climate change**	66	42
13				Poor overhead infrastructure**	44	28
14				Inflation**	51	32

1 Multiple responses were elicited
2 Calculated as a percentage of 164 (number of households in transiting category)
3 Calculated as a percentage of 159 (number of households in stagnating category)
*Contrasts condition of households stagnating in poverty
**Applicable to households transiting from poverty
Source: Ssempebwa et al. *(2012)*

Traditionally, eight of these factors are positively related with mobility from poverty. Indeed, the respondents who characterised their households as poor or *stagnating* in poverty cited eight factors for the stagnation of their households and contrasted them directly. However, five of the factors cited by the households in the *stagnating* category, namely, livestock diseases, bereavement, taxes, climate change, poor overhead infrastructure and inflation, are also applicable to the households in the *transiting* category. The finding that the majority (71%) of the respondents in the *transiting* category cited 'hard work' (described in terms of resilience, diligence, innovativeness and diversification) for the status of their households suggests that the households work hard to overcome these impediments. The 'hard work' appears to be supported by the households' members' educational attainment, involvement in gainful employment, inheritance, access to markets, frugality, access to productive resources, social capital, good health, serendipity, mobility and remittances. However, the finding that the majority of the respondents from these households expressed discontentment with the households' statuses (Table 5) gives credence to the view that although their hard work is supported by these factors, they work hard because they are not content with their situation (Table 6). Conversely, the stagnating households' syndrome of disadvantage is compounded by their contentment with their status (Table 5).

Accordingly, this study demonstrates a basic point: despite their indisputable challenges, many of the *stagnating* households are stagnating because they are content with their situation. This position appears to corroborate Bird and Shinyekwa's (2005) view that some people stagnate in poverty because they are indolent, albeit superficially. Although the finding that households stagnating in poverty were content with the statuses of their households suggests that these households are complacent, it is the researchers' scorecard that characterised them as stagnating in poverty. Incidentally, there were disparities between the attributes of this scorecard (i.e. access to healthcare, education, asset ownership, quality of water and sanitation, income, food security and dwelling) and some of the things respondents in the *stagnating* category characterised as wealth (e.g. children). It is also notable that these respondents did not simply characterise their households as well off (Table 5); they possessed the things that they characterised as wealth (Table 6). Although this does not necessarily make them well off, the disparity between their characterisation of poverty and the *conventional* characterisation of poverty has an implication for the methodology of poverty reduction strategies in the country. In as much as the production of poverty and wealth is rooted in the material production of society and has objective indicators, those fighting to alleviate poverty need to synchronise their definition of these indicators with that of the poor, whose transition from poverty they are trying to facilitate. Conversely, review of related literature indicates that the poverty alleviation programmes that have been implemented in Uganda focused on attributes of poverty/wealth that are similar to those in the researchers' scorecard – analogous to fixing square pegs in round holes. This appears to account for the *failure* of these programmes to positively transform the stagnating households. The finding that the *stagnating* households had access to the things they considered as constituting wealth suggests that the poor are able to pursue and achieve wealth the way they know it. Thus, closing the gap between their perception of development and that of development planners/practitioners, with the result that the poor perceive development the way those promoting it perceive it, could enhance the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programmes in enhancing social transformation. This view is in concurrence with the conclusions from the study of the critical success factors in Caritas Kenya's Self-help Programme and aspects of related studies conducted in the DRC, Mozambique and Rwanda.

Evidence from the DRC, Mozambique and Rwanda

Teams of researchers based at Université Catholique de Graben (DRC), Universidade Catholica do Mocambique (Mozambique) and Universite Catholique de Kabgayi (Rwanda) surveyed the perceptions *poor* people in their countries hold about their poverty and needs, and related their findings to relevant poverty alleviation programmes – to account for the performance of the programmes. The teams made three common findings that support the case for poor-people-led poverty alleviation programmes. As in Uganda, each of the research teams found ostensibly poor people but who felt that they were not poor. Secondly, sizeable proportions of the participants who admitted to being poor indicated that they are endowed with valuable resources, notwithstanding their poverty. Ironically, however, the teams also found that many of the poverty alleviation programmes identified in the study areas neither disaggregated the poor by their perception of their poverty nor exploited the resources the poor believed they possessed to their advantage, which appears to account for the ineffectiveness of the programmes in enhancing social transformation.

Implication for the Political Economy of Poverty in the Global South

The foregoing discussion proposes that poverty alleviation programmes are more effective if they involve the poor in defining poverty, assessing their needs and in designing and implementing poverty alleviation programmes. This sits well with literature underscoring the need to contextualise poverty (e.g. Harvey & Reed, 1992; Hashemi, 1996; UMU, 2009; UMU, 2010). Conversely, observable practice in many large-scale poverty alleviation programmes (mainly by governments and multilateral development organisations) in sub-Saharan Africa is at variance with the proposition. This appears to explain the persistence of poverty in the region despite investment of colossal financial resources in a multiplicity of poverty alleviation programmes (cf. Collier, 2007; Moyo, 2009). This being the case, it is recommended that organisations working to alleviate poverty from the region elicit and integrate the *input* of the poor into the design and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes – as is done in savings and internal lending communities (cf. Section 2). This will not only ensure that poverty alleviation projects/programmes reach the people they are intended to reach but also that they do so in an effective, cost-effective and sustainable way.

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Disclaimer

We wish to affirm that the views expressed in this article are ours and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU), CROP, the American University in Cairo or their partners.

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