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The Global Poverty Consensus Report

ASAP  Academics Stand
Against Poverty



Comparative Research
Programme on Poverty

The Global Poverty Consensus Report – August, 2015
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ASAP – Academics Stands Against Poverty
<http://academicsstand.org/>
CROP – Comparative Research Programme on Poverty
<http://www.crop.org/>

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Table of Contents

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1 Foreword

3 **1. Introduction**
1.1. The Project
1.2. How the Report Was Done
1.3. People

7 **2. Level of Consensus Observed**
2.1. Poverty: Causes and Persistence
2.2. Recommended Policies and Solutions
2.3. Millennial Development Goals (MDGs)
and Beyond

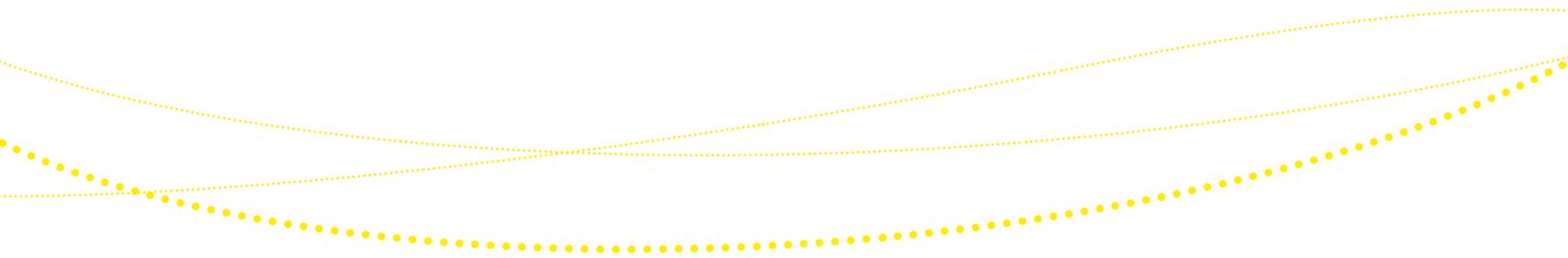
26 **3. Concluding Remarks**

27 **4. List of Interviewees**

31 **5. Interview Questionnaire**



Foreword



Poverty is a politically explosive subject. It is not hard to understand why. Poverty has horrible effects on human beings, human communities, societies and cultures. Moreover, the incidence of poverty is substantially influenced by policies and institutional arrangements. As a consequence, the discourse about poverty is highly politicized. Defenders of the *status quo* will argue that existing poverty is not so bad, is decreasing as fast as reasonably possible, and is mostly due to choices made by poor people themselves. Critics of the status quo will argue that poverty is far worse than necessary, is not being reduced at an acceptable rate, and is mostly due to unjust social institutions or defective economic policies. Convincing the public, either way, can matter greatly, as the French and Russian Revolutions attest.

In our time, the poverty debate plays out in many countries—in developing countries such as China, Brazil, India, Mexico, Indonesia and the Philippines, and also in affluent countries such as Britain, Spain, Greece, Australia and the United States. With globalization upon us, there is also a new poverty debate about global policies of international agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF, as well as about global institutional arrangements such as the rules of the World Trade Organization Agreement. This new debate follows predictable lines with the defenders of the Western globalization project arguing that it is rapidly eradicating poverty, while its critics contend that it aggravates inequalities and thereby unnecessarily perpetuates poverty.

Finding themselves in a highly charged political environment, poverty researchers cannot help but be aware of the potential political repercussions of their work. As they make choices about what to study, how to study it, and how and where to present their results, such researchers often try to anticipate the reactions their possible actions might provoke. This politicization of their work magnifies the diversity of views represented in their discourse, as expressed views reflect not merely ordinary



differences in method and subject matter plus ordinary academic pressures toward independence and originality, but also differences in political sensibilities and career pressures. Given the resulting extraordinary diversity of views, it can be quite hard for non-expert citizens to form a well-grounded opinion about poverty. For example, about whether the last 30 years of globalization have been an unprecedented boon for poverty eradication or a great opportunity missed, as our new global order was allowed to be structured by the rich for the rich.

But then of course, ordinary citizens *ought* to be able to form well-grounded views about how well their government is doing in regard to poverty. Much is at stake, morally, in their government's decisions, after all, and citizens bear ultimate responsibility for what their government does in their name. Here, scholars and educators can and should help the general public get a better understanding of the relevant issues, thus making a valuable contribution to a well-functioning democracy. The Global Poverty Consensus Report (GPCR) endeavors to make this kind of contribution by laying out what leading poverty experts think about the central question. That is, what they agree upon, what they disagree about, and on what points there still remains substantial uncertainty. By laying out the state of the art, as it were, this work also makes it easier for citizens to acquire more learning beyond the GPCR and for other experts to weigh in on the debates.

Gilad Tanay is to be commended for coming up with the idea for the GPCR and for conducting the interviews, and Alberto Cimadamore and Lynda Lange for turning the interviews into this pilot report. They have laid a strong foundation for the full GPCR, which will take the methods used here and apply them for a more comprehensive survey of expert opinion on poverty. It is to be hoped that others will take up the work here begun, thereby raising the level of debate about poverty, both internationally and within many countries, and raising also the quality of the efforts made toward finally ending poverty everywhere in the world.

Thomas Pogge

Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs, Yale University
President of Academics Stand Against Poverty and
Chair of the CROP Scientific Committee

1

Introduction

1.1

The Project

The Global Poverty Consensus Report (GPCR) is an ongoing joint project initiated by Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) and supported by the Comparative Research Program on Poverty (CROP). The goal of this preliminary report is to pilot one method of identifying existing consensus among recognized experts on the causes of extreme global poverty and possible pathways to its eradication. Over the long term, the GPCR aims to address a commonly identified problem: because scholarly journals, research institutions, and media of all kinds reward debate among experts rather than agreement, it is often difficult to identify expert consensus. Indeed, the authority of academic experts is often undermined by the appearance of constant debate.

The GPCR aims to contribute to the global conversation on poverty by identifying existing consensus among a limited number of experts about the causes of poverty and how best to eradicate it. This discussion has taken on even more than its usual urgency, with the United Nations framing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a 15-year plan for international cooperation towards poverty eradication, which will be agreed to in 2015. The GPCR differs from other scholarly work on poverty in that it does not evaluate the arguments of particular experts or the nuanced disagreements among them. Instead, it seeks to highlight consensus among those experts, with the intention of strengthening the impact of widely shared expert views on topics that are key to understanding and eradicating extreme poverty.

The report is based on interviews done in 2012 with thirty-nine recognized experts in the field, and therefore can only represent the consensus found in this group. A list of those interviewed, with links to their professional profiles, is provided in Section 4. While the patterns of consensus described below are interesting and carry weight on account

of the expertise of the participants, they cannot be regarded as conclusive results for the field. The pilot had significant methodological limitations (described below), which inevitably rendered it preliminary and experimental.

The GPCR is intended to be accessible to a wide range of interested persons, including academics, students, journalists, and other non-academic researchers, as well as policy makers. There are three main sections. The first section reports participant views on the causes of contemporary global poverty and what contributes to its persistence. The second section reports their views on positive steps that could be taken to alleviate global poverty, how feasible those steps are, and impediments to progress. The third section reports their opinions of the current global plan for poverty alleviation, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the nature of the process that brought the MDGs into being, their value and limitations, and recommendations for the SDGs that will take effect after the MDGs expire at the end of this year.

Finally, the concluding remarks reflect on the results of this pilot and provide some initial thoughts about transforming it into a more ambitious project to track leading research and to observe existing and emerging consensus in the field of poverty research.

1.2

How the Report Was Done

This pilot report is based on thirty-nine semi-structured interviews with experts recognized for their knowledge of issues related to global poverty, and/or their knowledge of the MDGs. The group of participants includes scholars in various academic disciplines as well as experts working with nonprofit organizations and international institutions. The interviewees are listed in Section 4 along with links to their professional profiles. The interviews took place on Skype.

The interviews did not follow a consistent protocol, but were conducted in a rather conversational manner. While the interviews did generally conform to the questionnaire, which is printed in Section 5, the interviewer did not always ask all of the questions of each participant, sometimes for lack of opportunity. The list of participants probably also reflects a selection bias: many experts were invited to take part, and of those who had some connection to the interviewer, ASAP, or CROP, a larger proportion agreed to participate than of those who had no such connection.

The analysis was not carried out by the same person who conducted the interviews. The joint authors volunteered to write the report



after the interviews had been completed, which created some methodological difficulties that we hope to correct in future work on the GPCR. The authors analyzed transcripts of the interviews by tracking the views expressed and the responses given on particular topics. They developed general themes in order to categorize the wide variety of responses. The themes were then grouped into the three sections of the report. There was no absolute consensus — even on topics on which there was general agreement, interviewees’ perspectives differed in subtle and un-subtle ways. However, interviewees themselves did sometimes express the opinion that “there is consensus” on a given topic.

The authors of this report are from different disciplines such as philosophy, political science, and international relations. They examined the interviews using qualitative and analytical tools of their respective disciplines. Their preliminary conclusions were assembled after a process of analytical discussions that at the end were convergent at the end. Several drafts were exchanged and the authors jointly approved the final report.

The aims of the GPCR project are ambitious, and as noted above, there were methodological limitations. The analysis was based on a relatively small number of interviews that cannot be considered representative of the universe of experts on poverty and poverty-related issues. The findings are limited to the views of the participants listed in Section 4. Finally, experts’ contributions to the report do not imply their endorsement of the report as a whole.

Poverty has been on the top of the development agenda during the past two decades, and the objectives of alleviating poverty and eradicating extreme poverty are now generally unquestioned by informed persons. In order to effectively reduce, eradicate, and prevent poverty, we first need to determine what the main causes of poverty are. This knowledge is essential for the creation of logical, feasible, and effective anti-poverty policies and interventions. Experts have accumulated knowledge—frequently divergent, partly due to professional and scientific incentives—that needs to be integrated, synthesized, and presented in a simple way in order to be discussed by a broad range of agents with the ability to take effective action against poverty. The GPCR is consequently conceived as a modest and straightforward beginning contribution in that direction.

1.3

People

The joint authors of the pilot report are Alberto D. Cimadamore, Scientific Director of CROP; and Lynda Lange, Professor Emerita of Philosophy at the University of Toronto Scarborough.

The authors are very grateful for the diverse contributions that helped create the report. Gilad Tanay, Executive Director of the Ethical Research Institute, came up with the idea for the GPCR and initiated the project, conducting all of the interviews and organizing several events to help get the project off the ground. Had it not been for his work, the report would not exist. Carissa Velíz, a doctoral student in Philosophy at the University of Oxford, contacted and recruited many of the experts who were interviewed. ASAP interns transcribed the interviews. Jacob Sommer provided research assistance.

Miguel Angel Santángelo designed and formatted the report, and Karlheinz Lüdeking provided a preliminary design for the cover. Rachel Payne and Chelsea Papa, staff coordinators of ASAP, granted much appreciated support at every stage of the work.

2

Findings and Levels of Consensus Observed

2.1

Poverty: Causes and Persistence

Overview

Global poverty is a highly complex phenomenon caused by factors at different levels of analysis, from local to national, and from regional to global. Although all of those interviewed for this report were aware of this complexity, they were not questioned about each specific level. Rather, they were asked, in general, what factors in their experience and knowledge have a relatively large impact on poverty production and persistence worldwide. Due to the greater focus of the interview questionnaire on the global economic order, responses tended to address that level more than others, although this was often qualified by mention of factors at other levels, as will be reported.

The highest degree of consensus in response to questions about the causes of global poverty and its current persistence was that the **international institutional economic order**, especially as it has been advanced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), is a major contributor to the persistence of poverty, and even a cause of it. Virtually every interviewee remarked on the negative impacts of the global order, which keeps in place arrangements that have been advantageous to developed countries but detrimental to developing countries.

This being said, several respondents pointed out that the features of this global order are not solely responsible for poverty, as will be seen below. It is more a question of the relative effects of international versus domestic factors, which cannot be assessed abstractly, but only concretely in particular cases. Nonetheless, the global order generally puts limits on possibilities in developing countries, which can be quite severe.



The next most frequently cited causes can be roughly grouped into: **domestic factors in wealthy developed countries**, such as migration policy and agricultural subsidies, as well as belief systems and existing concepts of poverty, development, and aid; and **domestic factors in poorer developing countries**, such as social inequality, and to a much lesser extent, corruption.

Last but not least, participants said that the persistence of poverty could partially be attributed to a **lack of explicit commitment to values and theories of justice**, such as rights to basic goods, on the part of actors promoting development.

International economic order

The contributors to global poverty in the international institutional economic order include **extreme inequality of influence amongst countries** in shaping the priorities of global economic institutions, **flawed models of economic growth**, asymmetrical or unfair **trade agreements**, and **intellectual property rights regimes**.

It is generally recognized that **extreme inequality of global influence** among countries has shaped global economic rules and practices, many of which have implications for development. The richer developed countries have been the major players and beneficiaries in the creation and maintenance of the global economic order, in part because of their influence on the policies of the international economic institutions. In a world still dominated by nation states, governments seem inevitably to pursue the interests of their own state and their own state only, though not necessarily those of their own people or citizens. Representatives of states in global economic negotiations will tend to understand the interests of their state in terms of the priorities of their major economic players, unless there is significant countervailing political pressure.

One respondent expressed the view that behind relatively powerful states, there is probably a preponderant influence of “a global rich constituency” of extremely wealthy individuals who are the main beneficiaries of an increasingly unequal global economy. Only one person pointed out that it would not be unreasonable for government officials to think of the global common good, as officials in an electoral democracy are in principle expected to think of the common good of the country and not only the interests of their constituents.

“ ”

This is not, of course, a novel view that it is really the large countries that determine what the economic order should look like. And if you look historically, organizations like the World Bank have been created with the huge preponderant influence of basically five to six countries.

– Branko Milanovic

Bretton Woods institutions should probably be re-thought quite profoundly. The IMF and the World Bank have not done nearly enough to reduce world poverty. And the IMF has contributed to undermining a number of economies.

– Alicia Ely Yamin

There is such a radical context of inequality that... there is a standing threat of unfairness.

– Michael Blake

Among the responses concerning global institutions, almost one-half of respondents cited the **neoliberal model of growth**, or neoliberalism as a political belief system (i.e. the opinion that a *laissez-faire* approach to economics is always to be preferred, the prioritization of economic growth over social issues, and the idea that private sector growth by itself causes poverty reduction) as an actual cause of global poverty. Neoliberalism has been espoused by the global economic institutions for several decades and has been problematic, and even destructive, for many impoverished countries. As will be seen in the discussion of the concept of development, respondents argued that the neoliberal focus on trade has not worked well for many developing countries, although they also said that there have been instances of local benefits. Structural adjustment, a policy under which World Bank and IMF loans were made conditional on reducing state intervention, was seen as one of the most harmful legacies of international economic institutions. It should be noted that structural adjustment, which often results in cutbacks to social welfare programs, is at odds with the MDGs' call to governments to improve access to healthcare and education. Only a few argued that capitalism itself is a cause of global poverty—that is, independently of the more specific ideology of neoliberalism that has characterized capitalism for the past four decades.

Most of those interviewed were asked to identify claims about poverty around which there is consensus, and these opinions are highlighted from time to time in the Report.

“ ”

I think everyone agrees that neoliberalism during the eighties and nineties created a lot of poverty.

– Judith Teichman

[Growth in developing countries] is not even the ultimate real objective of the developed countries. The developed countries want developing countries to open their markets; they want a free trade system. They want it so that all these things can go, and be exported. That is really what they want. You can see the whole of the aid business as leverage to achieve that.

– Richard Jolly

Trade agreements were criticized for being very frequently advantageous to countries already developed, but not to poorer developing countries. It was argued by many that at the root of this systemic bias is relative power and the way that it is reflected in the international rules. Some participants claimed that it is unlikely that anyone knowledgeable about international relations would disagree. Developing countries continue to be exploited in the literal sense that more wealth flows out of them than flows in. The think tank Global Financial Integrity has shown that developing countries lose much more money to illicit financial flows, which include the proceeds of organized crime and corruption as well as evaded taxes, than they receive in aid and foreign direct investment. Furthermore, trade agreements with concomitant loans have left many developing countries bearing the burden of odious debt, which they cannot pay without cuts to public sector spending. Another visible consensus appeared on this topic.

“ ”

I don't think anyone disagrees with the fact that many aspects of global trading rules are unfair to developing countries.

– Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

Included in institutional and legal contributors to global poverty is the current **international property rights regime**. Some participants stated that it creates overly restrictive patents on pharmaceuticals, as well as on software, agricultural innovations, and other products, which put them out of reach for many who need them. Proposals for how intellectual property rules should be changed appear in the second section of this report.

Domestic policies in wealthy countries

There are two **domestic policies common amongst wealthy developed countries** that participants claimed contribute directly to the persistence of global poverty. These are **agricultural subsidies** that largely prevent developing countries from competing in agricultural markets, and **restrictions on migration** between countries. These restrictions limit the opportunities of poor people to migrate for work to earn money that can help lift them out of poverty.

Domestic policies in developing countries

Corruption at the domestic level of **poorer developing countries** constituted the least-referenced category of responses regarding causes of poverty. However, more is said about corruption in the next section (2.2) on solutions and recommended policies.

Belief systems

Four major concepts related to global poverty were each cited by about one-quarter of respondents as examples of how common belief systems and/or ideologies contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. These concepts are: **poverty** itself, **development**, **aid**, and the link between **poverty and inequality**. Beliefs related to each of these four concepts were mentioned as impeding action on extreme poverty.

Some respondents felt that a clear definition of the term “**poverty**” is crucial to understanding, eradicating and preventing poverty, as well as measuring success and failure. It was pointed out that strategies and actions against poverty in the MDG period 2000-2015 were based on a restrictive definition of poverty that is based on income alone. Many international organizations use the World Bank’s definition of extreme poverty as living on \$1.25 or less per day. Even though most participants criticized this way of defining poverty in both quantitative and qualitative terms, the interviewees acknowledged how pervasive this definition is due to the prominence of the above-mentioned institutions in the global discourse on and action against poverty. The view that poverty is multi-dimensional is widely held amongst participants, but many acknowledged that multi-dimensional poverty is difficult to measure. It

was also pointed out that many people live on more than \$1.25 per day, but are still very poor. This vulnerable group is constituted by a very large number of people who live just above the extreme poverty line and are at constant risk of sliding further down.

Prejudicial attitudes towards the poor held by members of wealthy societies were identified as a serious problem. The belief that people are poor because they are lazy, lack capacity, or have a moral or cultural failing was seen as a contributor to inaction. One respondent remarked that elitism causes even the most sympathetic to think of the poor as “a separate class of people”.

“ ”

Racism is the worst problem—not talked about because there is no opponent to push back against; no one says explicitly racist things.

– Michael Blake

I think the major [false ideas] are arguments about culture, and we no longer talk about race as the genetic factor that determines poverty. Culture is much more the argument that is out there, but the arguments are exactly the same as the arguments that were made about race prior to the Second World War.

– Craig Murphy

I think the most false idea is indifference, basically lack of interest in what happens elsewhere and whether poverty is present. It's just sort of a very narrow view.

– Branko Milanovic

Last, but not least, is the fatalistic view that global poverty will always exist. This is linked, at least indirectly, with the view that the problem is either rooted very deeply in history and societies, or that it is just too complex to deal with. These views were strongly countered by at least some of those interviewed, as we will see in the section on solutions.

There seemed to be consensus that extreme poverty could be eradicated at a cost that is a very small compared to the wealth of developed countries and their citizens, yet also an understanding that the political feasibility of poverty eradication remains in question. This is, to some extent, related to the belief systems and ideologies that underpin public debate in some rich countries.

What is meant by **development** is as debatable as what is meant by poverty, and the question of how to measure development is comparable to that of how to measure poverty. About a quarter of respondents stated that development cannot be understood solely in terms of income,



GDP, or trade, and these cannot be the only yardsticks to measure development. The global debate on development has taken an approach that is overly “top down,” failing to consult locally about preferences, possibilities, or ideas. Measurement is also an issue. Some participants insisted that development must be about human well-being, and that “well-being is measurable”. Some participants recalled the 1970s as a time when there was a much more nuanced or progressive view of development than there has been in recent decades, reflecting the need to revive a debate on what development means in the 21st century.

Although international **aid** is normally regarded as a response to the problem of global poverty, almost a third of participants mentioned aid as a potential *cause* of poverty persistence. These individuals argued that aid is donor-centric and primarily meant to help achieve the goals of donor countries and may not address the structural causes of poverty. However, participants also argued that “aid still matters,” and should not be discarded; what matters is how the aid is used.

Consensus emerged among participants on the **link between poverty and inequality**. They pointed not only to unequal power relations among nations, as discussed above, but also to classism, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and socio-economic systems that produce and increase poverty at the domestic level. Only a few individuals mentioned inequality between women and men as a contributor to poverty, but this appears to be an unintended effect of the questionnaire, which did not allude to gender.

Normative approaches

About a third of respondents stated that a shortage of **normative thinking and argument** in poverty eradication efforts has contributed to the persistence of extreme poverty. The most significant position, which many respondents returned to when asked about solutions or recommendations, is that rights to basic services should be addressed along with economic policies.

“ ”

There are no acceptable moral or normative grounds on which we can justify denying communities autonomy over their survival needs – such as food or water. But while such autonomy may benefit some groups, others may claim to be harmed. In the face of such conflicting claims, we have to hold firm on what we think are non-negotiable moral and political principles, and then apply normative thinking to adjudicate conflicting

claims about compensation and entitlement. We cannot waver on our principles just because our methods of adjudication seem inadequate.

– Ananya Mukherjee-Reed

2.2

Recommended Policies and Solutions

As may be expected, the policy recommendations and other solutions to the problem of global poverty that participants put forward generally reflect what they saw as the causes of poverty in the first place. The informal style of the interviews meant that many mentioned the same topics under both causes and solutions. Nonetheless, when asked directly to recommend solutions or policies, previously unmentioned ideas were put forward, and those are described in this section.

International economic order

Almost three-quarters of respondents made suggestions regarding the reform of the **international economic order**, referenced in the previous section. Many reiterated the view that the global community should rethink not only the way that institutions like the World Bank, IMF, and WTO have been structured, but also the neoliberal model that they promote. For example, many respondents said that these institutions prevent developing countries from establishing policies to protect their major industries from foreign competition. Many called this unfair because many developed countries have used protectionist policies in the past and continue to do so. For example, subsidies and other protections for agricultural producers in developed countries make it difficult for developing countries to compete. Indeed, some of the countries that have lately prospered the most, such as China, India, and South Korea, have not simply opened up to market forces, but have channeled them in accordance with their own domestic interests. One respondent notes that in countries where poverty has declined, it is not due simply to trade, globalization and growth, but also to the way these states have managed market forces and channeled them toward social well-being.

“ ”

In spite of the view that liberalization of trade is the solution, and the use of China as an example, China's policies are not [...] total openness. It is really a mixture of state sector, collective sector, open trade and local

protections [...] There is much greater acceptance now that countries can use their own institutions in order to shape their own policies.

– Branko Milanovic

As mentioned above, participants viewed global economic governance from the perspective of challenges facing developing countries, and proposed solutions to eliminate or correct for problems such as asymmetric trade liberalization, tax havens, and illicit financial flows. Some participants regarded certain international economic agreements as impeding development and poverty reduction. For example, many participants recommended reform of intellectual property laws, since policies like those promoted by the WTO's TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) hinder access to key goods and services like pharmaceuticals and vaccines and limit innovation in developing countries. One respondent suggested that medicines should have differentiated prices in order to make them accessible to the poor, since market prices put them out of reach for poor people. Another respondent remarked, "the (free) market [in medicines] is not the only sensible model". In regard to accessibility, about one-fifth recommended the creation of a global public goods fund to help guarantee access to basic medicines and other essential goods for people facing emergencies like natural disasters, which exacerbate existing public health concerns.

The question of how to finance mechanisms aimed at alleviating or even eradicating poverty elicited responses beyond usual social policies and measures. A financial transaction tax was mentioned as a "particularly feasible" way of raising money for global endeavors, and more specific initiatives such as the Health Impact Fund were also suggested.

International economic institutions received particular attention during the interviews, and a number of participants argued that they urgently needed reform – possibly more so than domestic institutions themselves.

“ ”

We can't defend the rights to a decent standard of living, as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Arts. 25 and 28, and also support the international institutions that end up failing these rights...Yes, there is corruption in some countries, but the rules of international commerce also weigh heavily on poor countries that apply the rules of good governance internally.

– Ernest-Marie Mbonda

Over half of respondents recommended that we need improved frameworks for regulating global financial and/or commodity markets, and to

promote trade and tax transparency. More is said on transparency below. Tax avoidance – which is now a relatively well-known issue – reduces the resources of states and ultimately affects their ability to deal effectively with poverty and inequality. Some respondents stressed the importance of avoiding financial instability and crisis, since poor countries are much less able to withstand financial shocks. Several respondents mentioned the “financialization” of the economy as a problem. One argued the “financial powers should somehow be made to invest in the real productive economy,” making explicit what was implicit in several other responses that highlight the outsized power of the financial sector vis-à-vis the rest of the real economy.

“ ”

The financialization of the world economy has been very bad for poverty; you have a situation where the financial system is many times bigger than the real economy, making poor countries extremely vulnerable to financial crisis.

– Duncan Green

The complexity and multidimensionality of **poverty**, raised in Section 2.1, received even more emphasis in the discussion of solutions. Some respondents argued that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and that initiatives that focus solely on addressing income poverty are insufficient.

“ ”

There is broad consensus that poverty alleviation is broader than just income and must include at least concerns about health and education.

– Malcolm Langford

Just under one-quarter of respondents said that more liberal policies towards **international migration** are important for poverty alleviation. Those who mentioned it strongly emphasized how much it can help individual poor people. One remarked that the flow of goods and services is much more liberalized than the flow of people and ideas. According to Rolph van der Hoeven, migration is the most difficult issue in international relations and there is no consensus amongst countries about how to manage it.

After recommendations about the global macroeconomic framework, the two next most referenced areas were the link between **poverty and inequality** and the need for more **consultation and participation** in the political system. The first issue is linked to the debate on taxes and redistributive social policies. The second is linked historically to the debate about the meaning of democracy and democratic forms of government. Each of these was referenced by at least half of all respondents.

Respondents stated that **inequality** ought to be addressed along with poverty because both must be solved for development to be sustainable and equitable. Addressing inequality emerged as one of the central themes of the interviews, but because participants often referred to inequality in an undifferentiated way, it was sometimes unclear whether the solutions they were proposing were intended for specific countries or for all countries.

About twenty percent of the respondents remarked on the impact that domestic politics and belief systems have on levels of **social inequality**, including marginalization and discrimination, racism, caste systems, and ethnocentrism. About one-quarter stated that attention to human rights, including those of women, should be part of any project to alleviate poverty and promote social justice. One respondent noted that “solutions are not always institutional, it can be societal forces”.

“ ”

The importance of [addressing] social inequality is an emerging consensus in the last twenty years.

– Meera Tiwari

The previous section dwelt at length on participants’ views about reforming the international economic order. The consensus seemed to be that foreign aid makes little sense as a solution to global poverty until this ultimate cause is addressed. That point having been made, this section reflects what participants *did* have to say about **foreign aid**. Responses on this point generally focused on the need for greater **consultation and participation**, especially in regard to the nature of the aid, its targets, and administration and accountability systems.

About half of respondents said that increasing local consultation in relation to the use of foreign aid is very important, arguing that decisions about the use of aid should be made by recipients themselves rather than donors. One person observed, “we still have not given up our willingness to preach policy to poor countries.” Others criticized foreign aid for reflecting the strategic interests of donor countries more than the needs of poor people.

“ ”

There should be policies for engagement with a wider range of actors in development. We can’t take action if people are not part of it, do not understand why.

– Meera Tiwari

That being said, many respondents were critical of the widespread idea that **foreign aid** is ineffective for alleviating poverty because it helps to

justify wealthy countries contributing very little to international development. Some respondents took the position that foreign aid is necessary but that it is only a small part of the solution to poverty. Most said that development initiatives financed with foreign aid can be positive if they are sustainable, reflect local development priorities, and are designed in such a way that they can be continued even if foreign aid levels fall. Taken together, these recommendations figure aid primarily as a tool to consolidate, in the short and mid-term, local forces and agents towards sustainable development objectives.

“ ”

There are aid projects that work well – the idea that there are not is mostly uninformed. Greater aid is needed. I say that knowing the criticisms and shortcomings, and knowing that greater growth is also needed.

– Branko Milanovic

At the same time, Peter Singer argued that aid is justified for increasing well-being and relieving suffering, even if it does not bring about systemic change. This means that donor aid clearly continues, and will continue, to be necessary in cases of natural disasters and man-made catastrophes such as armed conflict. Whatever the cause, poor countries are least able to deal with emergencies, which directly exacerbate existing poverty.

Respondents acknowledged that domestic corruption remains a problem, though some said that this should not be used as a reason not to give aid. Consultation with local groups does not eliminate the risk of corruption undermining aid, since consultation itself is easily affected by corruption. That is why some participants argued that more **democracy** is what is really needed for good development. However, many of those who emphasized the importance of democracy went on to acknowledge that meaningful democracy is hard to achieve in societies with very high levels of poverty and inequality.

Many respondents expressed concern about the effects that corrupt and dictatorial governments have on development, and because of the obvious difficulty of removing such governments, some recommended the creation of an international agreement that limits buying natural resources from such governments, when it can reasonably be assumed that the proceeds will not be used to the benefit of the population. One participant suggested a similar international agreement limiting corrupt and dictatorial governments' ability to borrow money on their country's behalf, since those debts would have to be repaid by all citizens, often creating disproportionate burdens for the poorest and most vulnerable.

“ ”

We should recognize that the stock we take out of the earth is the collective property of humanity. No one in the developed world has not benefited from the cheaper gas we get by doing deals with dictators.

– Rolph van der Hoeven

These proposals open a complex normative debate on how the international community ought to deal with dictatorships and corrupt governments and who decides when a government is abusing power. This issue exceeded the objectives of the interviews, and respondents put forward many contrasting views. Nonetheless, one respondent made a pragmatic proposal:

“ ”

On the question of resources and non-democratic governments there is a solution. Publish the contract. This would be a constraint on the drafting process and the ultimate contract.

– Raymond Baker

Baker also noted that there is a slant in our view of “corruption”:

“ ”

Our western multinational corporations play the biggest role in illicit financial flows. We should be careful about the word “corruption”. We have a system where there are huge numbers of corporations where nobody knows who owns them – there is no argument in favor of this. I honestly believe that the global financial system is the most damaging economic condition hurting the global poor.

– Raymond Baker

Accountability is ultimately necessary to give legitimacy to foreign actors’ involvement in development. However, the interviews exposed many difficulties in establishing accountability. In an effort to define accountability in foreign aid, one respondent emphasized “democracy and rights,” while another mentioned “participation and rule of law,” but added, “all of these terms are very ambiguous.” These responses were interpreted to mean that for aid to be accountable, it must fit into a developing country’s vision for itself.

The few specific recommendations that respondents made regarding accountability for aid were that recipient countries ought to be primarily accountable to their own people and that donor and recipient countries alike should be held responsible for the use of aid money. Respondents appeared to assume that there would be strong resistance to even the most modest accountability mechanisms, such as foreign governments reporting more fully on their international development activities.

The strong normative connotation of “accountability” can be partly avoided with the notion of “**transparency**,” which came up frequently in the discussion of tax evasion and illicit financial flows, principally by multinational corporations. There are identifiable agents in governments, corporations, and international organizations who could be identified as either legally or morally accountable for facilitating abusive tax practices. Bank secrecy and tax havens, sanctioned by the international community, are central to the flow of resources out of developing countries. A few respondents insisted that this problem can be corrected.

“ ”

Current information technology is already able to make tax evasion by multi-national corporations impossible.

– Owen Barder

Greater financial transparency is quite doable – it is not terribly complex. It is a matter of political will.

– Raymond Baker

The need to improve the **measurement of poverty** was mentioned by about one-third of respondents. Questions about measurement are at the heart of controversy about poverty and development and have implications for the design and evaluation of any sustainable development initiative. Respondents mentioned the difference between simple income as a measure of poverty and a more multidimensional view, as well as the conceptions of development as increasing GDP versus development as wider social improvement. Two expert respondents stated that a multidimensional approach to poverty “makes it impossible to measure”. Others stated firmly that well-being actually can be measured and that the view that it cannot be is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The dominant measure of poverty, particularly in connection with the MDGs, has come from the World Bank, which, according to one respondent, “does not like multidimensionality.” There seemed to be broad consensus about the need to define poverty in a multidimensional way, along with the conviction that measurement is as difficult as it is unavoidable. Another respondent commented that good data collection and analysis are very important and ideally should be done by well-resourced independent institutions.

Many respondents said that academic work on the measurement of poverty, as well as on all other aspects of poverty and development, is very important, and no one stated that further such academic work is superfluous.

As mentioned in the first section on the “causes and persistence” of global poverty, about one-third of respondents raised **normative or theoretical approaches** as important issues. Regarding “solutions,” even more focused on this aspect. One respondent placed the dominance of certain ideas in global perspective:

“ ”

Many world leaders go to universities in the U.S. Doctrines are globalized, promulgated, and supported by powerful institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, which have extraordinary inertia and power... Academics can make a contribution here. They could give a sense of a much wider range of policy possibility.”

– Duncan Green

Under recommended solutions, four people explicitly mentioned the need for more money from taxation. Onora O’Neill stated the ethical view that we need to have a culture in which it is considered shameful not to pay your taxes. The idea that global poverty could be solved with growth and trade alone sidelines questions of greater taxation and redistribution, and even rules them out as supposedly counter to the project of growth.

However, two-thirds of the respondents in this category stated that the most important normative approach to global poverty is creating a standard of universal access to a decent standard of living through basic services such as food, water, sanitation, health care, and education.

“ ”

There is much agreement that we need universal access to basic services.

– Jan Vandemoortele

Can extreme global poverty be eradicated without burdensome costs to the developed world? An indeterminate number of respondents seemed to assume it is possible in practical terms, but probably still politically not feasible.

“ ”

I do not believe that the resources cannot be found. When the financial collapse took place, seventeen trillion dollars were found to socialize the losses of people who are otherwise making profits in the private sector. If we cannot find the resources to alleviate world poverty, it means that people don’t care.

– Solomon Benatar

Several pointed to the reality that poverty is not just a problem of people far away, and that income inequality has grown greatly in the developed

world. Those who feel poor in the developed world will be less likely to “buy in” to a project of alleviating poverty elsewhere.

Even though climate change was not a specific question in the interviews, about one-quarter said that attention to climate change and environmental sustainability is critical when looking at the broad picture of poverty eradication and socio-economic development. This view also prompted comments about the fact that conventional thinking about economic growth needs urgently to be put under scrutiny:

“ ”

[...] there is a realization that continuous economic growth is not possible; the planet cannot take it. The challenge is not sustainable development but developing sustainability.

– Solomon Benatar

When the question of the most serious impediments to poverty eradication was posed, one response perhaps synthesized what many have directly or indirectly expressed. According to Vaurun Gauri, the solutions will involve “politics, politics, politics”. If this respondent is right, the solution to poverty eradication, defined by the proposal of the United Nations’ Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals as the “greatest global challenge facing the world today,” lies ultimately in the political realm.

2.3

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Beyond

The Millennium Declaration, signed in 2000 by all 189 UN member states, led to one of the most visible and unified global campaigns to address poverty in history. Many countries and development programs decided to use the objectives and targets of the MDGs as a point of reference for their anti-poverty work. The United Nations has claimed that the MDGs are “the most successful global anti-poverty push in history” (The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2013). This evaluation, made by the organization that is mainly responsible for the monitoring of the entire process, was directly and indirectly addressed by the respondents.

Interviewees provided a critical assessment of the process that created the MDGs and expressed their views on the overall framework, the goals themselves, and the implementation of the plans intended to realize them.

There is a clear consensus among respondents of respondents who described the process of creating the MDGs that it was flawed due to a lack of participation of affected parties and/or a lack of transparency. Interviewees mentioned that the process was conducted “behind closed doors,” in a “top-down” manner which ultimately resulted in “pontificated” goals “driven by the donors.”

“ ”

I think it was a very bad process. It was non-democratic, and very constrained by the power structures operating within the UN. Not only economic but also in terms of gender politics.

– Peggy Antrobus

[...] the idea that the goals emerged from any sort of consultative or democratic process is certainly not correct.

– Sanjay Reddy

It is an asymmetric system, it is driven mainly by donors in the North, and less by people and countries in the South...[which suffered from a lack of] consultation with the public...[was] not inclusive in respect to people, and it was not inclusive in terms of listening, really, to the concerns of the South.

– Rolph van de Hoeven

Respondents’ perceptions of the impact of the MDGs were not all negative. Almost two-thirds of respondents who addressed the subject indicated that the MDGs were effective at creating international consensus around the importance of poverty reduction and eradication. About two-thirds of respondents who described the MDGs’ effects indicated that they had either focused attention on or raised awareness about human and social development at national and international levels. Almost half noted that the MDGs are measurable and created data for some fields in which data had previously been unavailable. One-third of respondents on the subject believed that the MDGs had “led to the transfer of some resources” or increased the total “mobilization” of development funds.

It would be difficult to maintain that the increase in the flow of foreign aid during the early 2000s can be attributed to the MDGs alone. Campaigns and social movements both at international and local levels have also successfully inspired increased focus on global poverty. Expert voices may have played an important role here by popularizing the idea that there are more than enough resources to eradicate and prevent poverty. With all that being said, there is nevertheless a clear consensus

amongst participants that the MDGs have played a crucial role in placing poverty on the global political agenda.

“ ”

I think that [the MDGs] were certainly instrumental in helping some of the Northern countries increase and maintain aid budgets... [and] the idea that poverty is an important concern in every country is something that the MDGs helped to entrench as a value...It's important that the MDGs actually helped maintain that emphasis on poverty.

– Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

We can disagree [about whether the goals selected] were the right ones [...] that's a separate debate altogether [...]. Bringing the global community together has been the biggest achievement of the MDGs.

– Meera Tiwari

The MDGs have given us a common language [...] they articulate a global consensus about what the overall objectives of policy should be internationally.

– Owen Barder

A minority of respondents indicated that they had non-normative and/or practical problems with the MDGs. More than half of all such responses focused on the data and measurements used to assess progress towards individual goals. Additional specific concerns raised by a smaller number of participants pointed to the necessity of counting on qualitative methods of assessment that allow going beyond the use of the \$1.25-per-day threshold to indicate extreme poverty in order to capture dimensions of poverty other than income. Interviewees argued that we will need a critical and independent approach to measuring progress on poverty eradication in the SDG period (2016-2030) needs to be promoted.

“ ”

[The MDGs failed to] invest in statistical systems, particularly in government statistical capacity, to measure progress on the MDGs [...]. We haven't invested in the global public good of measuring progress in societies that we are claiming to try to help.

– Owen Barder

Normative concerns about how the goals and targets were defined were raised by a clear majority of respondents. The most common responses were that the MDGs were either unambitious or lacked a clear strategy to achieve the objectives of the UN Millennium Declaration aiming to create an environment – at the national and global levels alike – conducive

to the elimination of poverty. Critical respondents seemed to imply that the selection of goals and targets reflected the assumption that many aspects of economic, social, and political relations cannot be changed. Even those who acknowledge the MDG's contribution of helping to increase and maintain aid budgets and put poverty on the global political agenda, such as Sakiko Fukuda-Parr quoted above, still consider the fundamental guiding principles of the MDG's severely problematic in the extent to which the process has been guided by narrow neoliberal policies.

“ ”

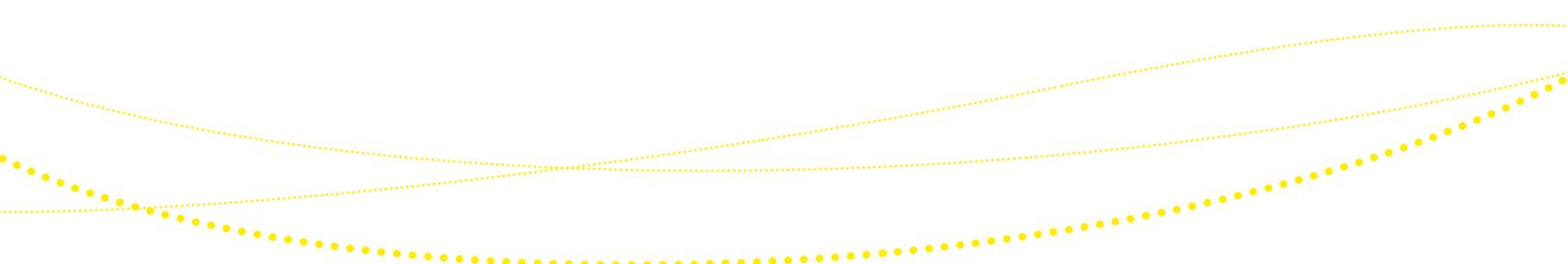
[...] the MDGs are very much compatible with a view of economic where what matters is to get the macroeconomic environment right so that you attract investments both from abroad and from domestic sources. You're basically concerned with the environment for investment [...]

– Sakiko Fukuda-Parr

The frustration in my view of the MDGs is that they are completely undermined by the framework that underlies Goal #8, the assumptions that trade and public-private partnerships that are part of the larger neoliberal policy framework could facilitate the achievement of the goals.

– Peggy Antrobus

In sum, the interviewees' assessments of the MDGs revealed both the successes and shortcomings of the initiative. There was clear consensus that the creation of the MDGs lacked the participation of affected parties and/or lacked transparency. However, this flawed process was mentioned alongside several perceived positive outcomes of the MDGs. What seems to be clear as well is that there is now enough data available to make a critical assessment of what has been achieved in reducing poverty, despite the aforementioned problems relating to measurement. Interviewees' responses also have implications for the SDGs. It seems that most of the respondents would share the United Nations' view that the MDGs have been the most prominent anti-poverty campaign in the history of development. Mobilization against poverty has peaked, indeed. However, respondents made it clear that the MDGs had several pitfalls, such as lack of consultation, problems with the definition and measurement of poverty, and establishing narrow or unambitious goals, that must be avoided by the SDGs if they are to help set the world on a new course towards equitable and sustainable development.

The goal of the GPCR is to identify existing consensus among recognized experts on the causes of extreme global poverty and on the possibilities for its eradication. This is an ambitious goal that outstrips the means available to produce this pilot study. This pilot aims to provide some input on poverty eradication discussions that will reach new heights this year as the United Nations decide on the successors to the MDGs. However, its primary purpose is to generate learning that will inform a larger-scale study of existing and emerging consensus on the causes of, and solutions to, global poverty.

Despite the modesty of what has been achieved so far, it seems clear that one of the provisional (non-original, of course) conclusions that this pilot has produced is that any successful strategy to eradicate and prevent poverty needs to better incorporate scientific knowledge of all kinds that is related to poverty.

An extra effort needs to be made to identify areas of expert consensus on how poverty is created and sustained and how it can be eliminated, based on evidence. This pilot was a learning opportunity to reflect on the methods that can feasibly be used to identify consensus. We remain committed to the goal of identifying consensus for several reasons. It can increase the impact of academic work on global poverty. It can act as a foil for the ongoing debate characteristic of academic work. It can enhance recognition of degrees of objectivity in studies that can be vulnerable to the winds of both academic fashion and politics. It helps identify possibilities for collaboration across disciplines and across multiple levels of policy making. It can offer some help to all kinds of persons concerned about poverty, whether they are academics or not, when they are faced with the great size and complexity of the problem.

4

List of Interviewees

Peggy Antrobus, Founding Member and Former General Coordinator of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, http://www.caricom.org/jsp/projects/personalities/peggy_antrobus.jsp?menu=projects

Raymond Baker, President of Global Financial Integrity, <http://www.gfintegrity.org/staff-member/raymond-baker/>

Owen Barder, Senior Fellow and European Director of the Center for Global Development, <http://www.cgdev.org/expert/owen-barder>

Solomon Benatar, Emeritus Professor at the University of Cape Town, <http://www.humanities.uct.ac.za/emeritus-professor-solomon-benatar>

Michael Blake, Professor of Philosophy and Public Affairs at the University of Washington, <http://www.phil.washington.edu/users/blake-michael>

Joseph Carens, Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto, <http://politics.utoronto.ca/faculty/profile/22/>

Alicia Ely Yamin, Lecturer on Global Health in the Department of Global Health and Population at the Harvard School of Public Health, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/alicia-yamin/>

Rosalind Eyben, Professorial Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, <http://www.ids.ac.uk/person/rosalind-eyben>

Bernadette Fischler, International Development Policy Advisor at WWF-UK, <https://twitter.com/baernadette>

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Professor of International Affairs at the New School, <http://www.newschool.edu/public-engagement/faculty-list/?id=87796>

Varun Gauri, Senior Economist in the Development Research Group of the World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/people/varun-gauri>

Jayati Ghosh, Professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, <http://www.jnu.ac.in/FacultyStaff/ShowProfile.asp?SendUserName=jayati>

Paul Glewwe, Distinguished McKnight University Professor of Applied Economics at the University of Minnesota, <http://www.apec.umn.edu/people/FacultyDirectory/PaulGlewwe/>

Duncan Green, Senior Strategic Adviser for Oxfam Great Britain, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-people/research/duncan-green>

David Hulme, Professor of Development Studies at the University of Manchester, <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/david.hulme/>

Richard Jolly, Honorary Professor and Research Associate at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, <http://www.ids.ac.uk/person/richard-jolly>

Maria Jose Guerra, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Universidad de la Laguna, <http://mjguerra.webs.ull.es/>

Mukesh Kapila, Professor of Global Health and Humanitarian Affairs at the University of Manchester, <http://www.mukeshkapila.org/about/inbrief.html>

Charles Kenny, Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Development, <http://www.cgdev.org/expert/charles-kenny>

Malcom Langford, Senior Researcher at the Chr. Michelsen Institute,
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ernest-marie-mbonda/](http://www.awb-usf.org/about/advisory-council/ernest-marie-mbonda/)

Branko Milanovic, Senior Scholar at the Luxembourg Income
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Ole Norheim, Professor in the Department of Global Public Health and
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Onora O'Neill, Emerita Professor of Philosophy at the University
of Cambridge and Crossbench Peer,
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Gustav Ranis, (1924-2013) Frank Atschul Professor Emeritus of International Economics at Yale University, <http://www.econ.yale.edu/~granis/>

Sanjay Reddy, Associate Professor of Economics at the New School, <http://www.newschool.edu/nssr/subpage.aspx?id=36516>

Kunal Sen, Professor of Development Economics and Policy at the Institute for Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester, <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Kunal.sen/>

Peter Singer Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University and Laureate Professor at the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne, <https://www.princeton.edu/~psinger/index.html>

Judith Teichman, Professor of Political Science and International Development Studies at the University of Toronto, Scarborough, <http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/polisci/judith-teichman>

Tom Tiekou, Assistant Professor of Political Science at King's University College – University of Western Ontario, <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/who-we-are/kings-profiles/kings-profile-thomas-tiekou>

Meera Tiwari, Head of Global Studies and Reader in International Development at the University of East London, <http://www.uel.ac.uk/lss/staff/meeratiwari/>

Jan Vandemoortele, Independent Researcher, formerly with UNDP and UNICEF, http://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/binaries/res_vandemoortele_tcm313-99273.pdf

Rolph van der Hoeven, Professor of Employment and Development Economics at the Institute of Social Studies, http://www.iss.nl/iss_faculty/profiel_metis/1100556/

General Questions

(i) [Areas of broad consensus]

What are the most important areas/topics/thesis concerning global poverty and its alleviation where you think there is now a fairly broad consensus among informed people?

[Recommend to differentiate along the descriptive, explanatory, normative and reform dimensions]

(ii) [Remaining areas of disagreement]

- a. What key areas of good faith, informed disagreement remain (concerning global poverty)?
 - b. What (if anything) can academics and others do that might help to resolve these disagreements?
-

(iii) [False ideas]

- a. What are some of the false (or only partially true) ideas concerning global poverty that are widely used in public and political debate to justify doing less than should be done to alleviate global poverty?
 - b. What are the strongest arguments against those ideas?
-

(iv) [International institutional order]

- a. What features of the international institutional/economic/political order are the most important in contributing to the persistence of severe poverty globally?
 - b. How might those features be changed?
 - c. Which of these changes might be the best objects for advocacy, taking account of feasibility and other relevant factors?
-

(v) [Other impediments to poverty eradication]

- a. What other impediments to poverty eradication are particularly serious?
 - b. Again, how might these features be changed?
 - c. Which of these changes might be the best objects for advocacy, taking account of feasibility and other relevant factors?
-

(vi) [Policy Recommendations]

- a. Taking into account political feasibility constraints, what are the top 3 policies you would like to see implemented towards the end of eradicating global poverty?
- b. Abstracting from political feasibility constraints, what are the top 3 policies you would like to see implemented towards the end of eradicating global poverty?

The Millennium Development Goals and their Successors

(i) [Assessing the MDGs]

- a. How would you characterize the process that was used for the formulation, adoption, and implementation of the MDGs? How inclusive was it? What were the main strengths and weaknesses in that process?

- b. What, if any, were the main benefits brought about by the MDG framework (e.g. Additional resource mobilization, resource allocation, new incentives, policy coherence, monitoring and data collecting, normative goal setting, new local level development strategies, etc.)?
 - c. Were there ways in which the MDGs were detrimental to poverty alleviation?
 - d. What do you think are the main weaknesses of the MDG framework in terms of overall design, conception of development, goals, targets and indicators?
 - e. How would you assess the degree to which the MDGs have been successfully achieved?
-

(ii) [The MDG Successors]

- a. Should the MDG successors be an extension of the current goals, an expansion/revision of the current goals, or something different altogether?
 - 1. If expansion/revision, what are the main goals and targets that should be prioritized.
 - 2. If something different altogether, what? What goals and targets should be prioritized?
 - b. What should be the process for the formulation and adoption of the MDG successors?
 - c. How should the responsibilities for the implementation of a future set of development goals be allocated among relevant agents in a way which is fair, realistic and effective? (e.g. OECD/DAC donors, the BRICS and other large developing countries, developing country governments, civil society organizations, the international human rights community, academics, multi-lateral organizations, the UN)
 - d. What sort of mechanisms should be in place in order to hold these agents accountable for fulfilling their responsibilities?
 - e. What would you consider to be the must-have essential features that any framework replacing the MDGs should have?
-