

POVERTY AND
ELUSIVE DEVELOPMENT





Dan Banik

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INTRODUCTION

Most people would agree that poverty is a bad thing. Efforts by a wide range of actors to promote development have in recent times yielded some positive results. Thus we have been witness to improvements in life expectancy and literacy together with a reduction in child mortality and the incidence of infectious disease in certain parts of the world. Nevertheless, poverty and inequality appear as resilient as ever and human development – understood as development that prioritises human well-being and aims at enlarging opportunities, freedoms and choices – continues to proceed slowly, with recent evidence painting a rather gloomy picture. Consider the following: 1.4 billion people in poverty, 1.6 billion live without access to modern energy, 25 per cent of the world's children suffer from malnutrition and one in six have no supply of clean water.¹ Despite the high expectations generated at the start of the 1990s, the past two decades have offered little hope to many poor countries whose populations increasingly find themselves in a complex web of poverty and deprivation. It is therefore relevant to question the current status of the development agenda and examine why development has generally eluded the poor. What is the development agenda? Who shapes it, and for whom? Moreover, to what extent is there agreement at national and local levels on the urgency of addressing issues of poverty and deprivation and what characterises the global commitment to address the challenge of poverty and inequality in the 21st century? Indeed, it may be plausible to claim that the development agenda is at a crossroads and some important choices will have to

be made and effective decisions must be taken. In order to do so, we need to flesh out and re-visit some of the factors that have made development elusive – perhaps on occasion even evasive – for large groups of the poor. Are we setting too ambitious targets for ourselves without possessing the required analytical tools? Or is it the case that despite our knowledge of the different types of deprivation, our response is coated in ad-hoc interventions, where dousing the flames of a fire is the goal rather than preventing the fire in the first place? If so, is it for want of finances? Or political commitment? Or both? Related to the above is the question of whether we are sufficiently aware of a set of strategies that best help promote development and reduce poverty, and whether world leaders demonstrate sufficient political commitment to fight poverty and inequality.

There are numerous books on development, and many more are being written as you read this text. And it would be perfectly natural to ask why one should write yet another book on development. My response would be that the goal here is not to provide yet another summary of the history of the term and the dominant theoretical approaches that have defined the discipline of development studies. Indeed, there are some very good books out there which address these issues. Rather, this work is an attempt to critically explore a small set of interrelated topics that I have worked on over the past decade or so. The choice of topics itself can be criticised for being too small, largely based on my own research interests, and that the book does not address several other, if not more, important topics. Let me make it clear right away: I sympathise with such criticism. Nonetheless, I believe the topics discussed in this book are not only important for an understanding of the factors that explain elusive development but furthermore are large enough issues to accommodate various sub-topics that may or may not be discussed in detail in this book.

The overarching argument is that we have reached a stage where there is considerable information about each particular topic and each particular problem and yet we do not see how these detailed bits of knowledge – some of them indeed quite substantial – are related to the larger picture of development or the lack of it. We are often reminded of increasing levels of poverty and immense suffering that characterises the lives of the poor in large parts to the developing world. And yet the general percep-

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tion is that despite the considerable effort that is being put into promoting development, we are not really achieving the goals and purpose that we ourselves have defined. Hence, it is pertinent to ask what we really know about development or the lack of development. To what extent do we really understand concepts and approaches that claim to explain why large parts of the world remain in poverty and large groups of people within these countries struggle to make ends meet? Do we possess too much knowledge about a particular problem and hence find ourselves digging deeper without being aware of other holes being dug at the same time? Moreover, how credible is our knowledge? And to what extent is our knowledge based on the knowledge and views of the people suffering, and consequently to what extent is our knowledge shaped by the views, intentions and perceptions of local, regional and national elites or well-intentioned organisations based in affluent countries? I do not claim to know the answer to all of these questions, but the aim of this book is to critically examine the following set of burning issues that are an integral part of the current development agenda: corruption, democracy, human rights, climate change and foreign aid. I discuss these topics on the basis of empirical evidence collected from fieldwork I have undertaken mainly in South Asia (India and Bangladesh) and in Sub-Saharan Africa (Uganda, Malawi and Ethiopia). Some of the material is also influenced by shorter research-related visits to Vietnam, Hong Kong, South Korea, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa and Mexico. There is definitely an Indian bias, however, since I have conducted extensive research in that country for more than a decade on numerous development-related issues. I have also tried to structure the essays such that an overview of the topic and main arguments are followed by an analysis of one or more case studies that I have conducted on the subject. Finally, some of the chapters build on guest lectures that I have given at various universities in Scandinavia and abroad over the past five years.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The chapters are somewhat provocatively titled and my original idea was that these will reflect the plot of a feature film, with a hero/heroine, a

villain, a sidekick, a saviour, etc. However, as the work with the book progressed, I found it difficult to cast the actors in this film on development and hence not all of the chapters have ended up with catchy titles. In the ensuing sections, I provide a short summary of the main arguments in the book, essay-wise.

In chapter two, I outline the case for development as the elusive agenda. I argue that while there may be numerous explanations behind the increasingly elusive nature of development, a combination of three interrelated sets of issues appears particularly relevant today. First, we must focus on the factors that actually produce and sustain inequality and poverty, in particular, by better understanding the motivation of individuals to attain wealth. In the development discourse, there is a considerable amount of attention directed at poverty reduction, while very few speak of inequality reduction. It is this reluctance to address the problem of inequality by both international and domestic actors that must be addressed at the earliest. Second, I argue that the development agenda has now become full of buzzwords that promise more than they deliver. And a new term or approach is coined and adopted by development agencies with recurrent frequency. While this can be seen as a way to address the continued rise of poverty and the lack of development in many parts of the world, such buzzwords appear to have become more a matter of rhetoric and less about operationalisation on the ground. Third, I focus on three crises that have dominated the development discourse in the past few years – finance, food and climate – and I argue that our obsession with ‘crises’ distracts, and prevents, us from addressing the vulnerability of the poor to chronic and acute forms of poverty.

One of the dominant explanations for elusive development in the past decade or so has been the negative role played by corruption in development, which is also the focus of chapter three. The advice of aid agencies and others to national governments aimed at combating corruption has, however, had limited impact. Indeed I believe that there is generally a lack of understanding of how corruption continues to thrive and is sustained by underlying structural causes and imbalances and those societal actors that continue to benefit from corrupt acts either in the role of a giver or a recipient. It is therefore of the essence to understand – using

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anthropological methods – how corruption actually manifests itself in relation to development interventions at the local level. I further argue that while corruption is the ‘usual suspect’ – since it is usually assigned most of the blame for failed development – we ought to delve deeper into the challenges of implementing public policy in order to understand why development interventions often do not achieve their desired results. Moreover, I argue that the discourse on corruption in developing countries often functions as a safety valve for overall frustration with government efforts or as an expression of a feeling of despondency. It is therefore too simplistic to accord corruption the main blame for all of the problems facing developing countries. Although it is usually a factor in some way or other, the corruption approach may not always offer the best explanation as to ‘why things do not work out as they should’. Thus while corruption is indeed a major problem, we tend to ignore the wider policy environment and although corruption is invariably an important factor, it is by no means always the sole factor behind elusive development.

An important debate on development has been the role of democracy in promoting economic growth on the one hand and distributing the benefits of growth and reducing poverty on the other. In chapter four, I discuss the ‘saviour’ role that has been assigned to democracy both in terms of salvaging and promoting development. While democracy is said to provide greater voice and influence to the poor than non-democratic systems, many democracies in developing countries are constantly struggling to achieve high rates of economic growth and reduce poverty. Hence it is pertinent to question why the democratic record of poverty reduction is not better and how democracies can improve their development record. In this quest, I examine the potential of democracies in promoting socio-economic rights and freedoms and discuss the historical trends and the argument for and against the democracy–development relationship. In terms of the challenges ahead for democracies in the developing world, I identify in particular, the role and conduct of elections to be crucial and argue that in many countries, elected leaders often appear to preserve and maintain the structures and processes that facilitate the continuation of poverty. Indeed, politicians may have

a strong incentive to maintain high levels of poverty, for example by undertaking ad-hoc interventions aimed at projecting themselves as the saviours of the poor during crises. As a result, the poor may feel that their survival depends on the charity of such leaders and hence the poor may continue to support these leaders by voting for them during elections.

Together with the increased talk of democracy being the saviour in promoting development one also finds the growing rhetoric of human rights, particularly in relation to human rights-based approaches to development (HRBA). Since the urgency of reducing world poverty requires innovative thinking, the HRBA – which views the process of human development being normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally aimed at promoting and protecting human rights – is considered by some to be a viable alternative to conventional (needs-based) development. Despite many potential advantages, the discourse on HRBA has unfortunately been one of rhetorical appeal rather than an emphasis on practical implementation and integration with existing development initiatives. In chapter five, I therefore provide a critical overview of the major conceptual foundations of an HRBA and identify several challenges in operationalising a global theory such as the HRBA to national and local practice in poor countries. Among these is the need for greater conceptual clarity at national and local levels; indeed, greater efforts are needed at the programmatic level and in the identification and awareness of what it means to be a right-holder and a duty-bearer and how one can effectively claim one's rights and carry out one's duties. I also argue that we need to systematically attempt to connect the HRBA to other accepted approaches, to learn and understand the language and the concepts of 'others'. This is necessary in order to bridge not only the gap between human rights advocates and conventional development practitioners but also in the quest to understand local demands and frustrations. I further argue that if the human rights approach is to make a substantial impact on poverty reduction, we must examine how, when and why global and national policies incorporate elements of HRBA and the motivations of actors who demand or resist the implementation of socio-economic rights. Most importantly, we need to better understand the national and local legal systems and strategies

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available to the poor that enable them to demand political accountability and recur to the legal system to see their rights enforced.

Among the most talked-about problems in recent years have been the challenges related to global warming and the resulting effects of climate change on our ability to live and survive on earth. Indeed, the climate change debate these days has achieved what the traditional environmental agenda could not – it is propelling countries and their leaders to recognise the threat that global warming poses to human life on earth and hence to start deliberating on global, national and local steps to adapt to the problem while at the same time undertaking efforts to mitigate the risk. The purpose of chapter six is two-fold. First, I provide an overview of the evolution of the climate change discourse, identifying major disagreements and agreements in the process. The aim is to provide a clearer view on how the traditional environment agenda is related (and may sometimes be at conflict with) the climate change agenda. I thereafter go on to specifically focus on the politics of climate change – the new ‘battlefield’ in international relations – and discuss the viewpoints of various groups and alliances of countries on the possibility of agreeing on a global treaty for climate change. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to understanding some of the challenges related to climate change and the environment at national and local levels. Using a case from India, I show the enormous political and administrative challenges of implementing a regulatory policy even when there exists clear evidence of environmental benefits for the local population. And while there is now growing consensus at the global level on the seriousness of the issue at hand, I will argue that there is still a lack of appreciation of the difficulties in implementing environmental friendly policies on the ground and the type of political commitment necessary to make substantive progress at local levels. I therefore question the extent to which global agreements on climate change will lead to concrete results at local levels. Does it help to think globally and act locally? If it does not appear to work in India, will it work in countries with weaker institutional frameworks?

The final chapter of the book is on the ethics of aid and an examination of the type of moral obligation we have as humans to assist those in

need, particularly those in distant lands. There are numerous arguments both for and against aid, but suffice it to say that in recent years there have been some interesting exchanges among various actors in the aid world regarding the conceptual foundations and effectiveness of providing aid. Thus, Robert Calderisi (2006, 163) claims that ‘foreign aid, as a whole, has not worked’ and that particularly in Africa, the record has been disappointing in ‘areas meant to tackle poverty directly’ such as in relation to ‘clinics, schools, literacy programmes, clean water supply, and sanitation’. Such conclusions provide support for the critique of foreign aid forwarded by scholars like William Easterly (2006), who has famously made the case for ‘searchers’, i.e. those who not only find things that work but also accept responsibility for their actions in comparison to ‘planners’ who tend to announce initiatives based on good intentions but are not in a position to motivate others to implement them. Planners are also supposedly more interested in applying ‘global blueprints’ rather than adapting to local conditions. Jeffrey Sachs, the economist who has often faced the brunt of Easterly’s criticism, has responded to this by claiming that Easterly’s ‘main methodological error is a failure to make careful distinctions across countries and types of aid programme. By neglecting to hone in on what has worked and failed in the past, Easterly conveys a misplaced sense of helplessness in the face of massive but solvable problems’ (Sachs 2006, 1309). He goes on to argue that: ‘The critical fact is that much is known about how to help the poor’ (ibid.). This is a contentious issue and in the final essay in the volume (chapter 7), I examine a set of dilemmas and challenges related to the provision of food aid, revisiting the debate on the ethics and moral obligations of offering food aid. I ask whether we are morally obliged to express solidarity with the poor in distant lands. A recent report by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO 2009, 8) estimates that the number of hungry people in the world increased between 1995–97 and 2004–2006 in all regions except Latin America and the Caribbean. However, even where there has been some success, the food and financial crises have slowed down the pace of efforts aimed at promoting food security such that meeting the hunger reduction targets of the Millennium Development Goals remains in serious doubt. Thus it is pertinent to ask how

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can individuals in rich countries influence the aid policies of their governments and to what extent can local elites in areas with high levels of poverty be held more responsible for providing assistance to the needy than those in faraway places, including regional and national capitals, affluent foreigners and complete strangers.

Numerous and potentially interesting topics that are relevant to a discussion on elusive development are, however, not specifically discussed in this book. These include, but are not limited to, problems associated with fertility and aging of the world's population, gender imbalances in development, land reforms, frictions in – and restructuring of – world trade and specific reform of key multilateral institutions, corporate social responsibility, specific health challenges posed by HIV/AIDS and other diseases, the work of Western bilateral aid agencies and the role of new donors like China, South Korea, Taiwan, India and Brazil in promoting development and combating poverty. Some of these issues are fleetingly mentioned in the various chapters, but deserve much more attention than I have been able to provide here. Nonetheless, the ensuing chapters are based on a selection of topics that I feel are important for an understanding of the idea of elusive development. The essays therefore deal not only with relatively broad and overarching issues but also with areas on which I have conducted empirical work in mainly South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Viewed together, I believe these essays go a considerable way in trying to explain the notion of elusive development.

THE ELUSIVE AGENDA

Development and poverty reduction are currently echoed in numerous social, economic and political contexts. But what does it mean to develop a society or a country and do we know what policies are best suited to eliminating severe deprivations that plague hundreds of millions of people in the world? Indeed, many development actors – including civil society organisations, multilateral and bilateral agencies, academics, media persons and politicians – are now debating to what extent the international community will be able to meet the development goals that are enshrined in the Millennium Declaration. Reflecting many of the above concerns, recent Human Development Reports from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Development Reports from the World Bank have shown that many of the poorest countries are doing worse now than they were two decades ago. With around 40 per cent of the world's population – 2.5 billion people – surviving on less than USD 2 a day, the task of national governments and the international community appears to be very clear-cut. We need to react now. The gap between the world's rich and poor countries is also widening and the world's richest five hundred individuals have a combined income that is greater than that of the poorest 416 million (UNDP 2005). Inequality is increasing even within countries that are otherwise making progress in terms of human development. A UN official put things in perspective when he observed a few years ago that, 'Africa cannot afford to see the world's richest countries sleep walk their way to a heavily signposted – and easily avoidable – human development disaster.'¹

Development has become the elusive agenda. The term elusive is often associated with a variety of meanings and phrases: One set of dictionary definitions focuses on issues that are ‘difficult to catch’, ‘shifty’, ‘slippery’ and ‘tricky’; another set of definitions emphasises features such as ‘baffling’, ‘fleeting’, ‘indefinable’, ‘intangible’, ‘puzzling’, ‘subtle’, ‘transient’ and ‘transitory’; a third set of definitions stresses ‘ambiguous’, ‘deceitful’, ‘deceptive’, ‘elusory’, ‘equivocal’, ‘evasive’, ‘fallacious’, ‘fraudulent’, ‘illusory’, ‘misleading’, and ‘unspecific’ characteristics of the term.² Elusive is also often used in connection with avoiding an issue, as in providing an elusive answer. Many of these terms, phrases and meanings appear relevant while describing the development agenda as we know it today. While there are a host of complex explanations behind the increasingly elusive nature of development, this book primarily focuses on five specific but interrelated topics – corruption, democracy, human rights, climate change and foreign aid – that are discussed keeping in mind the combination of three overarching sets of issues. First, there is an unwillingness to understand and focus adequate attention on the factors that explain the resilience and continued *production* of poverty and inequality. Hence, I start by arguing that in addition to re-focusing our efforts on poverty reduction, we simultaneously must focus our attention on the mechanisms that produce poverty. And in this context, I discuss ideas of wealth and the motivation that individuals have to be wealthy and argue that in the fight to eradicate poverty, we need to view development not just through the lenses of the poor but other groups as well – the rich, the middle class and all others who benefit from continued poverty. Second, development today has become increasingly buzzword-driven, with selected terms and approaches championed by a mixed group of development actors becoming rhetorically fashionable for short periods of time. However, these very same buzzwords do not appear to make much of an impact in terms of actual implementation on the ground, and are soon replaced by newer words, phrases and approaches. In this essay, I am particularly concerned with the role of aid agencies, donor governments and civil society organisations by looking at one of the major challenges in the development agenda, namely the promotion of the economic empowerment of women. Third, development interven-

tions today have become largely synonymous with ‘crises’. Accordingly, we tend to be attentive towards sensational events and outcomes rather than on the vulnerability of the poor and the routine and less sensational (sometimes even invisible) processes that perpetuate poverty. In the final section of the essay, I therefore examine the three ‘crises’ that have caught our attention in recent times – finance, food and climate – and examine to what extent these have strengthened our focus on events and thereby distracted our attention from the daily suffering of the poor. I conclude by arguing that our immediate attention should be trying to recognise, better understand and react to the strong bonds between chronic vulnerability and acute crises.

THE RESILIENCE OF INEQUALITY AND POVERTY

Recent poverty estimates (released by the World Bank in August 2008) show that every fourth person in the developing world (about 1.4 billion people) lived in a condition of extreme poverty, measured as surviving on less than USD 1.25 a day at 2005 prices.³ This is a major improvement from 1981 when the figure was 1.9 billion, i.e. when half the people in developing countries were in a similar situation. These figures are, however, substantially higher than the previous estimate of less than a billion people living on less than USD 1 a day in 1993 prices. Hence, the World Bank currently notes that ‘poverty is more pervasive than earlier estimated, and efforts to fight it will have to be redoubled, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.’ It also cautions that ‘lags in survey data availability mean that the new estimates do not yet reflect the potentially large impact on poor people of rising food and fuel prices since 2005.’⁴

The enormity of the problem makes it particularly relevant to briefly revisit the distinction between what is popularly known as ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ forms of poverty. Absolute poverty is characterised by severe deprivation of basic needs and refers to an individual’s requirements for physiological efficiency. Hence, there is a focus on subsistence needs, basic household equipment, and essential services like water, sanitation, health, education, transport, etc. Amartya Sen (1983, 159), for example, has argued that ‘If there is starvation and hunger then, no matter what the

relative picture looks like there clearly is poverty'. There is thus an 'irreducible absolutist core in the idea of poverty' which includes the ability to meet needs related to nutrition, health, housing and education. Understanding poverty in absolute terms, however, ignores the problem of income inequalities in society and the changing nature of social norms, needs and wants. By comparison, a relative explanation of poverty defines poverty in social terms, i.e. in terms of its relation to the standards that exist elsewhere in society. Poverty is defined comparatively, and the poor are distinguished from the non-poor. According to Peter Townsend (1993, 36), 'People are relatively deprived if they cannot obtain, at all or sufficiently, the conditions of life – that is the diets, amenities, standards and services – which allow them to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customary behaviour which is expected of them by virtue of their membership of society'. He goes on to argue that if people 'lack or are denied resources to obtain access to these conditions of life and so fulfil membership of society they may be said to be in poverty'.

In most industrialized countries, the term 'relative poverty' tries to capture an element of inequality that explains why some individuals and groups cannot or do not enjoy access to goods and services as compared to other groups in the same society. The concept is therefore increasingly used to describe conditions of poverty and social exclusion in many developed countries of the world. However, the use of poverty in such a manner has generated considerable opposition among some scholars, some of whom, like Sen (1983) argue that poverty ought to be understood primarily in absolute terms. Others argue that instead of relative poverty, 'inequality' ought to be used. The discussion so far points towards a move from simply focusing on development as poverty reduction to a phase where we actively can speak of development as combating poverty production. Indeed, as Else Øyen (2004, 305) argues, 'One way ahead in understanding the complexity of poverty formation may be to look closer at those "actions" and the actors involved in the process' who actually benefit from continued high levels of poverty. Development includes an enormous amount of conflicts of interest, and these must be taken into account by examining the 'forces that keep producing poverty in spite of the many poverty-reducing strategies that have been intro-

duced' (ibid.). In this quest, let us briefly re-visit the notion of inequality, which many believe explains the continuation of poverty, and related terms such as 'inequity'.

Inequality generally refers to a state or condition of being unequal and the term is frequently used to convey the difference in living standards between nations as well as within nations. But as Amartya Sen (1992, ix) observes, 'a common characteristic of virtually all the approaches to the ethics of social arrangements that have stood the test of time is to want equality of *something*'. Hence, any examination of inequality should start with asking, 'equality of what?' Although inequality is multidimensional and changing its many forms in tandem is a difficult task, it is now largely accepted that if inequality is to have practical meaning, it must be used in connection with other terms such as politics, gender, income, etc. I believe that inequality has greatest influence when used in relation to a problem. Often, however, the difficulty is that the problem is not seen as a *problem* by influential actors in society. Thus in order to address the issues, it would be helpful if inequality could be tied to a problem that is generally accepted by society to be a problem whether it be gender-related, child-related or starvation-related. Indeed, it has become a matter of routine these days to speak of 'poverty reduction' while many development actors, including international and domestic agencies, continue to feel uncomfortable about speaking of 'inequality reduction' as it involves confronting the power of national, regional and local elites. Hence, while many may accept that inequality is a problem, there is seldom a concerted effort to address it.

Despite recent efforts at expanding definitions of poverty to include, for example, elements of the concept of human development, 'poverty, at its core, is a manifestation of economic inequality' (Bermeo 2009, 6). Consequently, economic inequality is a broader concept than poverty. In this context, it is also useful to further consider terms such as 'equity' or 'inequity'. For example, 'equity' is often defined as the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair (global justice) while 'equality' is mainly understood as the quality of being the same in quantity or measure or value or status. Here, the distinction can be made between an ideal and a concrete result. This is, in many ways, related to a steadily

growing literature that looks at the relationship between human rights and poverty, where proponents of the human rights-based approaches argue that poverty is really about the imbalance in power relations in society. And while they recognise that actual results or outcomes in reducing or eradicating poverty are important, the crucial factor is the *process* by which such outcomes are achieved. In other words, is such a process empowering? And are such processes sustainable in the long run, in that the poor and those working for the benefit of the poor can consistently reach such desired outcomes? This is relevant because in most economic analyses of growth and poverty, inequality refers to end results on welfare, and not the material and intangible assets that may contribute to the explanation of these end results. Another key characteristic of the poverty-inequality relationship is that ‘where economic inequality exists, all actors are “unequal”, but where poverty exists only some actors are “poor”’ (ibid., 7). And this is important because, ‘poverty can rise and fall and leave economic inequalities among the non-poor unchanged or moving in an opposite direction’ (ibid., 8).

As mentioned earlier, not all feel comfortable with the term ‘inequality’ since it involves confronting the power of wealthy and influential individuals and groups. And perhaps in an attempt to address this issue, the World Bank (2006) – in its World Development Report – preferred to use ‘equity’, defined in relation to two basic principles – *equal opportunities* (‘a person’s life achievements should be determined primarily by his or her talents and efforts, rather than by pre-determined circumstances such as race, gender, social or family background’) and *avoidance of deprivation in outcomes* (‘equity is of intrinsic importance as a development goal in its own right, particularly in relation to health, education and consumption levels’). The report further made the case that ‘a broad sharing of economic and political opportunities is also instrumental for economic growth and development’ (ibid., xi). The greater the equity, the more efficient will a country be able to utilize its resources. And the pursuit of equity is ‘doubly good for poverty reduction: through potential beneficial effects on aggregate long-run development and through greater opportunities for poorer groups within any society’ (ibid., 2). However, not much has changed in multilateral institutions such as the World Bank since the

publication of the 2006 World Development Report. Indeed, the reluctance to address inequality directly in country operations appears well entrenched in the institution.

So, why is all of this important for our discussions? In terms of ownership of property and resources, a study undertaken by the World Institute of Development Economics Research (WIDER) found that 'while the richest 10 % of adults in the world own 85 % of global household wealth, the bottom half collectively owns barely 1 %. Even more strikingly, the average person in the top 10 % owns nearly 3,000 times the wealth of the average person in the bottom 10 %' (Davies et al. 2006b, 4). Among those in the category of wealth per capita over USD 50,000, one finds countries in North America, Western Europe (except Portugal), Scandinavian countries, Japan and Australia. In the next category – wealth per capita between USD 10,000 and USD 49,999, one finds countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Finland, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and Mexico. In the third category (USD 2,000 to 9,999), there is much of South America (including Brazil), large parts of Asia including Russia and China and some African countries like South Africa, Botswana and Morocco. Finally, in the lowest category of under USD 2,000, we find most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and others like Pakistan and India.

Within countries, there is also growing inequality, with a tiny elite controlling land and other material resources. Latin America is the continent with the greatest inequalities in income and access to land. Nevertheless, I believe countries like India and China – which are currently the recipients of universal praise for their impressive rates of economic growth and their ability to withstand the shocks of the latest financial crisis – are the ones with whom we should be most concerned. In the pursuit of rapid technological advancement and projected as the future leaders of the global economy, national authorities have begun increasingly to lean more towards the interests of the rapidly growing and increasingly powerful group of urban middle-class families at the expense of the rural poor. It is therefore important to discuss ideas of wealth and the motivation that large numbers of individuals and groups in developing countries have towards becoming wealthy. In development parlance,

it is far more common to talk about the poor and the characteristic features of their lives together with the causes of their poverty. In contrast, we are seldom witness to a discussion of those who often benefit from the development process and who in turn may be an important variable for the resilience of poverty and inequality in many of the countries in the developing world.

IDEAS OF WEALTH AND THE MOTIVATION TO BE WEALTHY

Dictionary definitions of wealth provide an interesting entry point to this discussion. 'Wealth' means, *inter alia*, the following: a state of being rich and affluent; an abundant supply of material possessions and resources; considerable property that has a money or exchangeable value; and generally a quality of profuse abundance. Others claim that the notion of wealth includes the following four main features: a material good; a good that is produced by human effort; a good that is capable of satisfying human desires; and a good having an exchange value. And while it is common to associate wealth exclusively with 'money income', the term is often interpreted broadly by economists to refer to the total value of household resources over which people have command (Davies et al. 2006a, 2).

The idea of wealth is intrinsically related to the pursuit of happiness and well-being. But what motivates people to become rich? Some have a desire to become rich since childhood. For example, William Boyce Thompson (the mining magnate) and John D. Rockefeller, when they were young boys, were convinced that they would become rich (Carroll 1998, 19). And Thompson and a few others like Andrew Carnegie, who were concerned about retiring having accumulated a certain amount of wealth, never really stopped their activities. Nonetheless, not all rich people remain motivated simply because they love wealth. Indeed, the rich themselves propose a variety of other motivations that include job satisfaction and philanthropic desires that provide status and recognition (ibid., 19).⁵ Most importantly, however, the prime motivation for wealth accumulation appears to be *power*. As Howard Hughes famously observed: 'Money is the measuring rod of power ... The effective use of money can bring power ... The effective use of power can bring money.'⁶

And there is a fear that giving away wealth or surplus money amounts to giving away control, thereby relinquishing this power.

Nevertheless, the linkage between *power and charity* appears to be strong in certain quarters and some have also argued that a major driving force to accumulate wealth is the desire to judge one's achievements in relation to that of others (Frank 1985). Others have argued that the importance of wealth lies in enhancing social status. Related to this is the increasingly popular trend of many extremely wealthy individuals to engage in philanthropy due to reasons that include desiring to create a particularly favourable image of themselves and their families, a lasting personal legacy and because they genuinely wish to create institutions that can sustain such philanthropic activities over a period of time. Classic examples of this kind in the United States include the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie-Mellon University, Duke University, Johns Hopkins University, the Getty museum, and the numerous professorships at Harvard, Yale, Stanford and Princeton named after wealthy individuals following generous donations by them to the universities in question. In 2006, we witnessed the mind-boggling sum of money available to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – the largest private endowment in the world. With this latest instalment of the donation by Warren Buffet, the total endowment of the Gates Foundation shot up to 33 billion dollars. And despite losses suffered during the latest financial crisis of 2008–2009, the amount of resources available to such a private organisation is very substantial indeed. Activities supported by the Foundation have also had a major and largely positive impact on many areas of global health and education.

In our quest to understand what motivates the wealthy to continue policies of wealth accumulation, it is also important to understand the point of view of small groups of influential elites in poor countries. For example, during a recent visit to Uganda, I happened to visit the Madhvani family estate – the Madhvanis being the richest family in East Africa. I was astounded by their wealth – the little town they owned with its own airport and jets and the palatial houses buzzing with the activity of hundreds of servants and attendants. My hosts were, however, keen to tone down their opulent lifestyles and constantly emphasised their key

role in the industrial development of Uganda. Indeed, they saw themselves as indispensable to the future economic growth of the country and felt that by accumulating personal wealth, they were in fact helping their country grow. Similar views are to be found in other countries, as is discussed in chapter 7 of this book.

Apart from these extremely rich people, it is also important to consider the views of the steadily growing numbers of upper middle-class families in many developing countries. Thus, for example, in India it is common to hear from such groups that since the government does not provide social security, the accumulation of private wealth has an element of sustainability to it. Parents seldom consider stopping such wealth accumulation since it can only benefit their children and grandchildren. As one gentleman put it, 'wealth is what separates us from the people living in slums. We have to build a wall to protect ourselves from future uncertainties and continue to strengthen this wall so that others – when they feel like it – cannot easily dismantle it and take away our privileges.' As I discuss in chapter 7, such attitudes also mean that elites may feel less responsibility for fighting poverty; it is usually left to other actors such as the state, NGOs and foreign donors.

The means to acquiring wealth and the instrumental value of wealth are often commonly shared in large parts of the world and across cultures. It appears also that in many countries, the most important outcome is to become rich without necessarily condemning the process by which people become rich. Thus acts of corruption, greed, cheating, lying, stealing or committing a particular crime may be overlooked in many societies as long as a wealthy person performs some good acts for the welfare of community, including religious and charitable acts. (See chapter 3 for a further discussion on these issues.) In other societies, by comparison, ethical principles are given more importance and the economic profit incentive may not necessarily enjoy complete dominance. Oil-rich Norway is a good example here, although it is not always clear to the general population that it is often extremely difficult to maximise the economic profit incentive on the one hand and ethical considerations on the other. This applies, for example, to a set of unique guidelines on how and where the national Oil Fund (officially termed the Government Pen-

sion Fund of Norway) should invest its money – high profit areas may also be ethically problematic such as the weapons and tobacco industries and others involving child labour. It also relates to the ethical guidelines that should govern the process by which major Norwegian oil companies compete with their competitors in securing lucrative contracts in countries with high levels of official corruption and dubious records on the protection of social, economic and political rights of their citizens.

Another issue in this regard is the curious relationship between wealth and *ostentation*.⁷ In many African, Latin American and Asian countries, it is crucial for politicians, corporate leaders and even bureaucrats to project themselves as rich. As they say, ‘image is everything’ and it is important in many poor countries to drive a chauffeur-driven Mercedes, wear the best suits and live in palatial residences because there is a need to be perceived as being powerful. The poor or loyal supporters welcome this display of wealth since they feel that some of this wealth would trickle down to them. Hence, being a big man or the distributor of goods and services is not only crucial for a politician in some of these countries but is also largely accepted by society to be an indication of power and influence. Even if a person is corrupt, his ability to distribute resources may provide him with a certain standing in society. And the wealthy derive immense pleasure from the fact that there are large groups of people – often residing in slums surrounding palatial estates – who do not have access to the same privileges. After all, they claim, what is the point in owning something that everyone else owns? Contrast this to the situation in a country like Norway where the *janteloven*⁸ has decreed that ostentation is, per se, very bad. Indeed, the traditionally wealthy group of people in this country prefer to keep a low profile. And when individuals blatantly show off their riches, they are accused of behaving in an un-Norwegian manner. It is thus quite acceptable to be wealthy in Scandinavia in general as long as one maintains a low profile, is not flashy, respects the law and, most importantly, pays all relevant taxes.

An enquiry into the linkages between wealth and well-being so far is interesting because it allows us to examine four sets of broad issues: the pursuit of wealth in developed countries and what motivates the super wealthy of the world; the pursuit of wealth in developing countries and

the fear of local elites of losing their privileges in some foreseeable future; the pursuit of wealth and individual and state responses to global injustice; unfair trade relations and unfair international institutional arrangements. Thus far, I have argued that there is an important moral element to how we choose to tackle these issues. In reality, we can abolish poverty from the face of this earth quite soon, if we choose to do so. But are we really committed towards this end? We need to question our own roles in fighting poverty. What can we do, and what should we do? Well, for a starter, we need to revisit the concept of 'development' and ask why it has had such limited impact for so long. Elsewhere, I have operated with a definition of development influenced by the work of Atul Kohli by which development is understood as a deliberate movement of societies towards a situation of more liveable life conditions (Banik 2006). Three critical elements of such liveable conditions are economic growth, some redistribution of growth, and democracy for the redistribution of the benefits of growth. Development is a process where these goals are to be maximised even though there may be trade-offs in the process.

In terms of development within countries, the main challenge is actually an old challenge: how to secure rapid economic growth and distribute the benefits of this growth in a manner so that inequality is reduced. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this and some of the foremost development economists cannot even agree on whether there is one single policy that can best reduce poverty. In this context, some argue that civil and political freedoms are crucial for the fulfilment of pressing economic need. Hence, the role of democracy in promoting development is very important, an issue that I critically discuss in chapter 4. The empirical evidence so far, however, shows that there is no positive correlation between democracy and development. Indeed, democracies tend to have a certain middling tendency while the best cases of rapid economic growth have taken place under non-democratic regimes in Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore. In other words, the challenge for democracies is not merely to achieve economic growth but also to include successful interventions aimed at reducing poverty and inequality. In this task there is a need to focus on human capital formation, i.e.

countries need to invest in poor people. Indeed, investments in nutrition, health and education are necessary to create economically productive countries. The provision of social welfare in developing countries is generally limited. Even in economically developed East Asia, welfare provision is quite new. But why is this difficult to accomplish? It appears that limited public resources are a major reason, which brings us back to the need for radical economic growth. A major form of accumulating public resources is through taxation. However, most poor countries, including democracies, face the problem of whom to tax. The rich usually oppose increases in taxation and the agricultural sector is informal and unorganised.

We also need to question the foundations and extent of our commitment towards reducing world poverty. Several recent studies have shown that there is a set of factors that explain why many aid projects and programmes have proved to be less effective than intended (OECD 1999). In recipient countries these include a low level of commitment to poverty reduction, inadequate participation of the poor and macro-economic and sectoral policies at variance with objectives of a development project. At the international level, bilateral donors and multilateral agencies are in turn criticised for frequent shifts in their concerns and policies that overshadow the need for stable long-term strategies, lack of co-ordination among themselves, the neglect of the institutional and managerial aspects of poverty-oriented projects and paying little attention to socio-cultural and political factors in recipient countries. There is also a tendency to focus on ad-hoc interventions of a fire-fighting nature rather than addressing the root causes of poverty. And as I discuss in chapter 7, a result of such practices is that it becomes a matter of routine (and perhaps an indicator of generosity) for rich country governments to prioritise emergency assistance rather than increasing the volume of long-term development aid.

THE ROLE OF BUZZWORDS IN DEVELOPMENT

The second overarching set of issues relate to the current inflation of buzzwords in the development vocabulary: terms, phrases and approaches

that often are characterised more by rhetorical appeal than actual impact on anti-poverty policy. Recent world events have indeed raised general public awareness on the seriousness of world poverty and deprivation and the urgency with which action must be taken. Parallel to this has been the phenomenal growth of the development industry and its use of an appealing bundle of buzzwords such as ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’, ‘ownership’, ‘rights-based development’, and ‘poverty reduction’. Indeed, ‘rights’ and ‘empowerment’ have become staple diets of the development community and are frequently used in different permutations and combinations along with related terms such as ‘advocacy’, ‘capacity building’, ‘stakeholder interest’, ‘project ownership’, and ‘accountability’ to name but a few. When articulated by donors and recipients, these buzzwords appear to be incredibly positive and persuasive, promising ‘an entirely different way of doing business’ (Cornwall and Brock 2005, 1043). In trying to reduce poverty, bilateral and multilateral development agencies have thus placed an astonishing amount of trust and prestige on their own ability and that of civil society to promote ‘an agenda for transformation that combines no-nonsense pragmatism with almost unimpeachable moral authority’ (ibid.). The impression given is that international, national and local organisations are ‘working together for the good, and that they have now got the story right and are really going to make a difference’ (ibid.). But the increased frequency and ease with which terms such as ‘rights’ and ‘empowerment’ are used betray the complex challenges that thwart their realization. Indeed, behind the scenes lies a multitude of voices, interests and perspectives that draw upon very different conceptual understandings of poverty, rights, and the relationship between the two. This has not only resulted in conflicting views on the role of development approaches influenced by the rights agenda, but also contributed to a lack of coherence and a weakening of buzzword-influenced development policy. As I discuss in chapter 5, the result is the articulation of appealing rhetoric often disconnected from the harsh realities of fighting poverty and inequality on the ground.

The constant desire to introduce new terms has not only flooded the development discourse with jargon that is difficult to operationalise, but there also appears to be little empirical evidence to suggest that

such concepts are being rigorously applied by those who are responsible for designing and implementing aid-driven development programmes. While the case can be made of a very diverse group of actors – bilateral donors, multilateral agencies, voluntary organisations – I will here focus primarily on civil society organisations (CSOs) based in developing countries, who have traditionally received a large chunk of the buzzword-based or buzzword-driven donor support. Accordingly, it is necessary to understand why ‘civil society’ continues to be considered as one of the main vehicles for donor interventions in the development field and consequently given substantial funds (often at the expense of elected governments). Then I will discuss the potential dangers inherent in the continued usage of buzzword-guided development by arguing that buzzwords generally do not live up to expectations when applied by development actors, and that ethical values end up being instrumentalised and often altogether lost.

CHANNELLING AID THROUGH CIVIL SOCIETY

The notion of civil society is variously understood but it is generally accepted that the term denotes ‘the arena between the household and the state’ (Azarya 1994, 96) and includes ‘groups and organizations both formal and informal, which act independently of the state and market to promote diverse interests in society.’⁹ Thus civil society is synonymous with ‘the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values’ and its ‘institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated’ (LSE 2004). However – and as Borchgrevink (2006a, 257–258) rightly argues – terms such as ‘civil society’ and ‘non-governmental organisation’ (NGO) require a nuanced understanding of the heterogeneity that characterises the organisations that are often placed under these categories. For example, in addition to a non-profit profile, one may need to apply criteria such as size (staff strength and economic turnover), sector of operations (single or multi-sectoral), target groups (general population versus specific groups like children, the aged, etc.), form of intervention (implementing projects versus funding others) and

value base (humanitarian or based on political ideology and faith). Thus CSOs include charities, NGOs, faith-based organisations, professional and business associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, coalitions and advocacy groups (LSE 2004).

The so-called ‘NGO decade’ (1980s–1990s) resulted in a radical increase in the number of organisations working in the development field and Edwards and Hulme (1996)¹⁰ estimate that in the OECD countries alone, the number increased from approx. 1,600 to 2,970 in the period 1980–1993.¹¹ There is now also considerable evidence available that shows how – starting in the late 1980s – major donor support has been increasingly re-channelled to civil society organisations (or CSOs).¹² This largely followed the gradual but steady distrust in the ability of the state in poor countries to undertake economic and political reforms and consequently deliver development. Civil society actors, including various types of CSOs – both foreign and domestic – began to be viewed as having a comparative advantage over the state in providing public services as it was assumed that they would be able to reach the poor more efficiently and effectively than traditional government agencies. And in Latin America, in particular, a host of countries (most notably Guatemala) began toying with the idea of letting CSOs take over some traditional areas of state activity like the provision of health care services (Thomassen 2003). More importantly, however, donor agencies acted in the belief that channelling development assistance through CSOs will actually promote democratization efforts in the developing world. This is also why the ‘rights’ and ‘empowerment’ vocabulary appears to have been somewhat ‘captured’ or become the sole property of the civil society sector. But the available empirical evidence on the impact of civil society in these fields paints a rather gloomy picture. Not only is there no consensus on the role that civil society should play in strengthening democracy, ‘relatively little is known about their effectiveness and impact’ (Robinson and Friedman 2007, 643). Moreover, numerous questions are currently being asked about the strategies they employ to influence public policy and whether they really represent the voices of the poor. And recent research shows that the few organizations that ‘have achieved significant policy impact’ – like trade unions and churches – are those that do not normally depend on foreign

aid. Their success has largely been traced to their organizational structure (based on membership subscriptions) and their relatively close ties with government (ibid., 663). Thus several recent studies conclude that the key ingredients explaining successful policy engagement by civil society organisations are ‘strong organizational capacity, a high degree of perceived legitimacy by the government, and adequate financial resources, whether derived from internal or external sources’ (ibid.). For example, the experience from the much-quoted and indeed very successful experiments of civil society participation in policy-making in Brazil show that csos need not necessarily risk cooptation, ‘but instead are more likely than their poorly connected counterparts to organise public demonstrations and to make demands on the government through multiple channels’ if they maintain close ties to political parties, and contractual relations with state agencies (Lavalle et al. 2005, 951–952). Finally, specific country histories are also quite crucial in explaining how civil society influences policy. For example, while civil society in South Africa and Kenya appears strong on policy analysis, providing regular inputs in policymaking, their counterparts in neighbouring countries consign themselves to simply running workshops for the elite few and planning largely untargeted advocacy campaigns.

ELITE-CONTROLLED JARGON

Although the general tendency has been to associate the notion of civil society with ‘a useful rhetorical handle that sounds inclusive, socially sensitive, and participatory’ (Pfeiffer 2004, 361), several studies suggest that local elites continue to control and influence the distribution of aid. For example, Chabal and Daloz (1999, 23) argue that at least in the African case ‘the explosion in the number of NGOs is not a reflection of the flowering of civil society in the sense in which it is understood in the West. It is in reality ... evidence of the adaptation by African political actors to the changing complexion of the international aid agenda.’¹³ Similarly, others point out that ‘by supporting predominantly organizations of urban elites, donors may inadvertently reinforce social inequalities, contributing minimally to the strengthening of organization of the poor and the poor’s capacity to articulate their concerns’ (Howell 2002, 127).¹⁴

Another potentially worrying trend is when large international NGOs repeatedly choose their development partners in poor countries – these are invariably the largest and also the best funded national organisations that are perceived to be capable of spending large amounts of money – quickly – and submit impressive reports that satisfy potential donor concerns. The result is that smaller, primarily rural-based organisations, doing innovative work (perhaps genuinely focused on rights and empowerment), risk being excluded from funding sources. Moreover, there appears to be considerable distance between those who head large NGOs and the constituency of poor people that they try to help – the inflated salaries (particularly in relation to other local professions, including the civil service) of some key civil society actors should be a cause of great concern and perhaps explain why the rapidly growing middle class in poor countries find the NGO sector so appealing. Indeed, with their complex levels of hierarchical relationships, codes, programmes and activities, most civil society organisations could well be mistaken for a large corporate house or government department; and involvement in this sector for many locals is really about making a decent living. Against this backdrop it might be rather odd to expect a great deal of idealism in the business. This in turn has implications for the ability of CSOs to implement the rights and empowerment agendas, which require radically different techniques than those that characterise officialdom. To put it bluntly, a large organisation has a lot to lose if the government perceives it and its leaders to be challenging state authority by encouraging people to protest and demand accountability and recourse. Thus, programmatic changes, based on or influenced by the rights and empowerment agenda, may risk being implemented slowly and discretely, thus reducing the political bite and effectiveness of such strategies to radically change the situation in favour of the poor.

‘POVERTY PROOFING’ AND ITS IMPACT ON THE USE OF RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT

In recent years, a new practice – ‘poverty proofing’ – has assumed considerable importance in the development field. This apparently common practice in many developing countries involves local CSO staff being en-

couraged to refer to the term ‘poverty’ as often as possible when writing policy documents, funding applications or reports for use in the organisation’s headquarters. The same applies to linking ‘poverty’, at least semantically, to all existing programmes undertaken by the organisation. The end result is, of course, more rhetorical than true impact and I believe some of the same fate is reserved for the terms ‘rights’ and ‘empowerment’ in that they too are simply incorporated in a large number of project documents and funding applications that please the donors. Moreover, and as the discussion on Malawi in chapter 5 shows, only a tiny minority – consisting of selected CSO representatives together with bilateral and multilateral agency staff – speak this exclusive language whenever they interact, be that at cocktail parties or in workshops. The problematic aspect is that the discourse most often stops at this level of interaction, is seldom operationalised in programming practices and is largely consigned to what is – even in CSO terminology – referred to as a ‘paper exercise’. And while some of the buzzwords may indeed be lucky enough to reach the lips of junior CSO officials, very few are actually able to explain what they mean by ‘advocacy’, ‘capacity building’, ‘accountability’ and ‘empowerment’ and how they use these concepts in their own work.

THE CASE OF WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The above discussion shows that we need to revisit and reexamine certain terms that have begun to dominate the development vocabulary. What do they really mean and how can we achieve such noble and often ambitious goals? I will here briefly discuss the concept of empowerment by focusing on one of the major challenges in the development agenda, namely the promotion of the economic empowerment of women.

For several years now, empowerment has been considered, by development agencies and others alike, to be an important tool for improving the well-being of women in all parts of the developing world. As with other popular concepts, arriving at a single and all-encompassing definition of ‘empowerment’ is a most challenging, if not impossible, task. Indeed, while reviewing the literature on the subject, I came across numerous terms that in some way or the other were associated by various authors to signify ‘empowerment’. These included: ‘self-efficacy’, ‘self-

determination', 'self-worth', 'self-interest', 'awareness', and the like. Some define empowerment as the 'restoration to individuals of a sense of their own value and strength and their own capacity to handle life's problems' (Bush and Folger 1994, 12).¹⁵ Others argue that understanding gender is crucial to an understanding of power relations (Batliwala 1994).

A most useful and nuanced understanding of empowerment is forwarded by the noted Bangladeshi academic Naila Kabeer (2002) for whom empowerment 'refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them'. Kabeer therefore argues that poverty and disempowerment are closely linked since meaningful choices cannot be made when a person's basic needs remain unfulfilled. Most people tend to agree that empowerment is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that is typically applied to individuals. However, organisations such as DAWN have emphasised the contextual and 'collective dimension of empowerment, expecting women's movements and organizations to lobby for and promote changes that fall in line with their vision of society, and to create the political will to encourage serious involvement on the part of those in power' (Hainard and Verschuur 2001, 46).

It is widely accepted that women in developing countries generally have difficulty with self-employment. There is widespread discrimination against women in terms of access to education, training and access to family income (Mitter 2004, 10–11). Interestingly, however, some recent academic work has highlighted the fact that 'societal roles or biological attributes do not always work against women.' Indeed, 'the patience and persistence needed for repetitive work or the ability and inclination to work in a team are the qualities that management often associate with women. This perception, real or stereotyped, partly explains the feminization of the workforce in the manufacturing industries of export-processing zones in the developing world' (ibid., 10). It also appears that 'women have found some scope in obtaining a market niche in the purchase and sale of information' (ibid., 11) and the case of Grameen phones in Bangladesh and freelance journalism in Malaysia are good examples of such activity (ibid.). Such factors are also shaping the current outsourcing industry in developing countries and the astonishing growth and popu-

larity of ‘call centres’ in India where young, educated women have greater freedom to earn a living. Other successful initiatives have been a network of housewives – the www.tortasperu.com.pe – in Peru which sells confectionary online and an online gift shop in Ethiopia which sells traditional attire and spices (ibid., 11). While in each of these cases there has been an increased opportunity to earn an income and support the family, it has also given employers ‘a flexible and non-unionized workforce’ (ibid., 10).

A story that has attracted widespread attention in recent years has been the rise of a group of black businesswomen in South Africa, a network which represents ‘a potentially powerful use of political space to assert women’s autonomy’ (Iheduru 2003, 473). And some observers and newspaper articles have referred to these women as ‘corporate feminists’ or ‘corporate Amazons’. The South African (ANC) government has been largely credited with the growth of such women’s initiatives, having introduced the Growth, Redistribution and Employment programme. GEAR, as the programme is popularly called, ‘made the cultivation of a black capitalist class – a “patriotic” black bourgeoisie – a state priority’ (ibid., 483). Having benefited an elite group of women, sceptics are, however, increasingly critical of whether the same benefits will, over time, trickle down to poorer and marginalised groups of women in South African society.

Another success story is the women’s movement in Uganda which – unlike other countries in Africa – has succeeded, against great odds, and ‘has had a visible impact on [pro-poor] policy as a result of its capacity to set its own far-reaching agenda and freely select its own leaders’ (Tripp 2001, 101). Some have highlighted the role of the National Resistance Movement in Uganda in allowing the women’s movement a great deal of autonomy. And despite considerable pressures for cooptation, the movement ‘has taken advantage of the political space afforded by the semi-authoritarian Museveni government, which has promoted women’s leadership to serve its own ends’ (ibid.).

Yet another successful initiative has been women’s self-help groups in India, where groups of 10–20 women are encouraged to get together – often by NGOs – to save money or food and help each other in times of crises (Jakimow and Kilby 2006). However, in many cases, increased

participation of women in such groups has not necessarily resulted in greater empowerment. Hence, a lesson from the Indian experience is that the variable of 'power' is crucial in order to tackle historical and cultural inequalities among the sexes.

One must also be aware of the contextual element of empowerment. For example, while evaluating the Small Enterprise Development Project (SEDP) in Bangladesh – which lends money to not-so-poor groups of women – Kabeer (2001) found that by participating in the SEDP, women were much more in control of their lives in that they enjoyed greater freedom in decision-making. Further, while female mobility in terms of access to the market had increased, it was not popular among all women. Indeed, local customs and the 'purdah' system in Bangladesh often make such mobility unattractive, as a woman's status in the community is directly related to her not undertaking manual labour and carrying out extensive travel. As a result, local women desired greater socio-economic 'status' by not venturing out of the house too often for work-related events. The main point here is that it would be a grave error had this project received a negative evaluation simply based on the continued use of the 'purdah' system in local society, and without considering what women valued for themselves.

In terms of the immediate future of economic empowerment, perhaps a couple of examples from Sri Lanka and Nicaragua will help illustrate the challenges ahead. The theme of violence in the pursuit of an economic profession, both at home and at the work place, is an important aspect in the development process since it 'reflects notions of power and subordination' (Hancock 2006, 212). In a recent study of women working in factories in Sri Lanka's export processing zone, large groups of women 'felt more exposed to potential violence ... due to the fact that they were required to travel far from home without male protection, frequently at night, and they believed that they were perceived by the community as 'fair game' as far as sexual abuse was concerned' (ibid.). The study also found that 'societal and legislative issues in Sri Lanka clearly hamper attempts to prosecute offenders or protect women from even the most common ... forms of workplace harassment' (ibid.). Four major reasons for such violence, according to women interviewed in the study, were:

alcoholism, economic problems, women challenging patriarchal power in the household or neglecting housework, and defying elders or disobeying in-laws (ibid., 217). Similar concerns over safety in the workplace have been a major concern of women working in call centres in India, after several, frequent and sensational reports of violence against women appeared in news columns.

In addition to violence, the psychological dimensions of empowerment are often overlooked in the typically buzzword-driven quest to promote one-sided economic empowerment. A fresh study, based on the impact of the health brigade movement in Miraflores, Nicaragua, emphasises the importance of being aware of ‘historical machismo’, ‘awareness of one’s own interests’, and ‘awareness of how one’s own interests relate to others’ (Jewell 2007, 53). Any understanding of genuine empowerment therefore must include these aspects, well-captured when a local Nicaraguan woman observed: ‘Now I learned that I need to ask about even things like, “Have you been faithful?” I found my voice’ (ibid.).

At this stage it is important to bear in mind that empowerment is currently used quite differently by international development agencies in comparison to what the term signified when it was launched by feminist groups in the 1980s. Indeed, a former student of mine has argued that the elements of *collective* mobilisation, awareness and the conflict perspective – as articulated by organisations such as DAWN – have more or less disappeared from the map of most international development organisations (Andresen 2004). Rather, it appears that two approaches of promoting women’s empowerment are currently in vogue. The first – an economic approach and favoured by institutions like the World Bank and the African Development Bank – focuses on making women more economically productive. The second approach, advocated in organisations like the UNDP, is more a rights-based one in which empowerment is seen as a necessary condition for achieving gender equality which in turn is crucial for overall personal and societal development.

I am suggesting here that while both aspects of empowerment are important, there is an urgent need to see the economic and rights-based dimensions of empowerment as part and parcel of the same goal. Thus, although some form of ‘empowerment’ may be achieved following tra-

ditional development theory and practice, there is often a tendency to focus simply on one isolated – perhaps even successful – result, rather than focusing on the *process* of protecting, promoting and respecting women’s rights. It is really a matter of making the fight for gender equality a sustainable one.

FROM BUZZWORDS TO MEANINGFUL APPROACHES

A focus on the ‘rights’ of the poor and their subsequent ‘empowerment’ has the potential of making a major contribution in our efforts to eradicate poverty. And civil society can play a vital role in translating these ideas into operational programmes. However, the two terms (along with many others) are currently being used so loosely that they are on the verge of losing their analytical and operational edge. One option may well be ‘to invent new words, or to pilfer from other vocabularies’ although this will not necessarily stop ‘the next new word sharing the fate’ (Cornwall and Brock 2005, 1056). What is needed therefore is a situation where buzzwords cease to provide the ‘feel good factor’ for civil society interventions but actually reshape development policy more focused on eradicating poverty and deprivation. I have argued that the current practice of inventing and re-inventing appealing rhetoric at a rapid pace appears more catered towards legitimising civil society (and donor-facilitated) interventions rather than actually shaping and facilitating the empowerment of the poor. And in the process of ‘operationalisation’ – from global theory to national practice – much of the substance in the rights and empowerment concepts is distorted or lost. The immediate challenge therefore is to limit such distortion when global concepts and approaches are operationalised into programming. At the same time, there must be a greater focus on holding civil society to account not only for failed projects and overall negative impacts resulting from an intervention, but also when the appealing rhetoric they use to solicit funds gets lost in translation when applied to concrete interventions aimed at promoting development and eliminating poverty. And this is important because the terms we use and adopt influence crucial development-related policies and the manner in which attempts to reduce poverty are conceptualised and implemented in the field.

Efforts to promote rights and empowerment are recurrently drained of political power and hence prove difficult to implement at the national and local levels. This is where the conventional wisdom of civil society independence from both state and society (I am referring mainly to NGOs and not political parties) is at odds with the empirical reality. As previously discussed, CSOs appear to have exercised greatest political influence when they have maintained close ties to political parties and state agencies which in turn have enabled them to organise public demonstrations and successfully receive concessions from the government. There is, however, no doubt that civil society can and does play an important role in development. Indeed, civil society-led development interventions have a long history of making vital contributions to poverty reduction all over the world. However, and given some of the shortcomings that I have just discussed, it would be a mistake to simply view civil society as a replacement for the state. Rather, CSOs could end up being more effective and influential when the institutions of local public administration and self-government are strengthened so as to be able to aggregate and articulate the demands of the poor. In this task, 'rights' and 'empowerment' can and must be used to change the way development is done. And a first step would be to replace the traditional notion of viewing development as a matter of charity and benevolence to one that is based on the actual needs and the rights of the poor.

THE ERA OF THREE 'CRISES': FINANCE, FOOD AND CLIMATE

The final set of issues that I believe continue to make development elusive relates to our pre-occupation with sensational crises while we forget that the poor suffer on a daily basis, even when we do not brand such suffering as deserving of a 'crisis' label. In recent years, three types of crises have been on everyone's lips, one related to the financial system, another related to food and the third related to climate change. The strange thing, however, is that by using the term 'crisis', one gives the impression that things just happen without a reason, i.e. no one can be blamed and no one decision can be traced back to have started the numerous

components of a process that leads up to the crisis event. This to me is a mistake and although I am aware that crises tend to push people into action, I believe we should actively work towards adopting a non-crisis perspective in the development agenda. It has now become a routine performance on the world stage to react to highly visible and sensational disasters. Those that react quickly and generously stand to gain a token of goodwill that stands them in good stead in international relations. By contrast, events that are slow but steady (and often somewhat less visible) and that are characterised by the entire (and long) process of impoverishment – which allows for considerable time to intervene – are generally swept under the carpet. A focus on a ‘crisis’ appears to awake us from our slumber and provides us with some form of moral urgency and even legitimacy to propose and/or undertake changes. And such responses, although useful in the short term, can at best be described as ad-hoc approaches of a fire-fighting nature. Thus the challenge of fighting poverty requires us not to separate the event (or a crisis) from the prior causes and processes.

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

Amidst predictions that global trade will shrink in 2009–2010 for the first time since 1982, there is growing concern that the impact of the financial crisis on poor countries will be quite harsh. The mantra of globalisation is suddenly under attack, a prospect quite unthinkable only a few years ago. Indeed, a large number of analysts have predicted that developing countries will generally be hit more severely by several self-reinforcing crises which may include a credit crisis, a currency crisis (i.e. a lack of confidence in weak currencies), a debt crisis (due to weakening of currency and higher interest rates), a real economy crisis (in that a decline in exports and credit will result in lower productivity and higher unemployment), a fall in foreign investments (even in ‘well-functioning economies’), a fall in remittances, a worsening of the food (and fuel) crisis that many developing countries were already suffering from before the onset of the financial crisis, a reduction in tourism and finally, a fall in development aid.

In a recent overview, McCulloch and Sumner (2009) identify five specific channels through which policy responses in developing countries

will most probably be affected by the impact of the financial crisis: trade, credit, remittances, private capital flows and aid. I will briefly address the first four but focus mainly on the last channel, that of aid. First, following each financial crisis (e.g. the 1997 Asian financial crisis), there is considerable fear of dramatic falls in the exports of developing countries that are largely due to a decrease in the demand from industrialised countries. The current crisis, however, appears to be more severe than in previous years since the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2009) has predicted that world trade will be reduced by over 10 per cent in 2009 alone. Developing countries that depend quite substantially on trade (e.g. Vietnam) and those whose exports have suffered some of the largest falls in prices (e.g. Nigeria, Angola and Zambia) are among the biggest losers from the current financial crisis (McCulloch and Sumner 2009, 3). Related to trade is the concern that private capital flows and access to credit from local banking systems in developing countries will be affected (World Bank 2009). Although it is mainly the Western banks that have borne that major brunt of the crisis, the banking systems in many developing countries (e.g. India, Brazil and China) are increasingly being linked to the global system. Many economies in Latin America and Eastern Europe in particular, have also typically relied heavily on remittances and with unemployment increasing in Western countries, the ability of immigrants to send money back home risks being affected.

Interestingly, there is also considerable agreement that the global downturn that is resulting from the financial crisis has been mainly caused by advanced economies and is not a result of bad policies in poor economies. Even in advanced economies most people are finding it difficult to come to grips with the changed reality when unemployment rates have drastically increased together with cutbacks in social security benefits. At the same time, the World Bank (2008) warns that in the coming years, 'political pressures towards more protectionist and generally more inward-looking economic policies may gather momentum in both developed and developing countries'.¹⁶ Several initiatives have therefore been announced in order to assist poor and middle-income countries to limit the damage and prepare for recovery. For example, in May 2009, the World Bank announced an increase in lending – a total of USD 100

billion over the next three years will be used to help the private sector through support for trade, banks and infrastructure projects. Similarly, the IMF – concerned with the limited room for policy manoeuvre in many countries experiencing a drying up of external financing, sharp drop in exports and a fall in commodity prices – announced that it is ‘beefing up its lending capacity and has approved a major overhaul of how it lends money by offering higher amounts and tailoring loan terms to countries’ varying strengths and circumstances’.¹⁷ In other words, there is now an attempt to modernize conditionality by relying on pre-set qualification criteria (*ex-ante* conditionality) rather than on traditional (*ex-post*) conditionality.

In the context of this essay, a particularly relevant feature is related to the experiences that can be drawn from the years of rapid growth in foreign aid. Is there a ‘threat to aid’ as is increasingly being claimed by several actors in civil society? If so, will this radically change the pattern and flow of aid in the near future? Alternatively, could this crisis be seen as an opportunity to correct past mistakes and drastically shake up the disbursement and effectiveness of foreign aid and thereby encourage a regime change? It is too early to see a consensus on the issue. Indeed, there is reason to believe that as their own economies continue to suffer from the financial crisis, rich countries will severely cut back on funds earmarked for foreign aid. This will obviously have a severe impact on the work of the United Nations agencies and civil society organisations on the one hand and on the other, aid-recipient governments in poor countries – many of whom rely on foreign aid to make a substantial contribution to their annual budgets. Given that aid has been ineffective in promoting growth and reducing poverty in many parts of the world, such possible cutbacks in aid could actually be a blessing in disguise, particularly for the so-called ‘donor darling’ countries that have not been able to show concrete results in lowering poverty rates. The financial crisis may therefore offer an opportunity to radically restructure the flow of resources to corrupt and ineffective administrations and this in turn may – at least in the long run – benefit the poor. One can also make yet another case of the benefits of the financial crisis – that of regime change. Take the case of the United Arab Emirate (UAE) – a

union of seven Gulf states that was created in 1971. During the past five decades, the union has seen unprecedented economic growth and improvements in living standards, and political opposition has not found support among the population. Indeed, when the economy is booming and unemployment is kept under check, people may not seem to mind being ruled by benevolent autocrats. With increasing concerns in the region following the downgraded credit rating of major Dubai-based banks, stalled infrastructure projects and unpaid salaries to workers by construction companies, there have been reports of growing dissatisfaction among the masses, although such opinions are still made more in private than in public. And there is indication that the ruling families may be forced to make concessions related to greater openness related to policymaking and revamp the legal system, in addition to putting in place measures that will give citizens the power to hold the government more accountable.¹⁸

THE FOOD CRISIS

The second crisis I wish to briefly discuss is related to food. In the last few years, there has also been a sharp rise throughout the world in the prices of most agricultural food commodities, due mainly to crop failures and below average harvests in many parts of the world affecting in particular, global stocks for wheat and maize. Another cause of this increase in food prices has been attributed to the growing demand for biofuel production, which has attracted considerable subsidies in many developed countries.¹⁹ In addition to food, oil prices have also increased and for the 41 poorest countries in the world, it is estimated that the combined impact will be a negative shock which will reduce the GDP in these countries by between 3 and 10 per cent.²⁰ According to recent FAO estimates, the number of hungry people increased by about 50 million in 2007 as a result of high food prices.²¹ Some countries are, of course, more affected than others. Thus food and nutrition insecurity, which has been one of the greatest global challenges today, has been further worsened. But the rhetoric that accompanied the dramatic increase in food, oil and commodity prices, particularly in the period 2006–2008, masked the real challenges and dilemmas that governments in poor countries faced in

taking steps to control the rise in prices on the one hand, and ensuring on the other, that the agricultural sector benefited from these events or that the poorest of the poor continue to be able to access an adequate amount of food to survive. Suddenly everyone was talking about how the crisis was going to affect the poor, when in reality most of those who were hardest hit were those who were already vulnerable during the so-called 'normal' or 'non-crisis' period. The point here is that – and perhaps because we may feel overwhelmed by the enormous challenges in front of us – we often tend to focus simply on the present which in reality is a very short period during which some emergency or hastily put together actions are taken (see the discussion in chapter 7 for more on the ethical aspects of food aid). And then we go on to the next crisis without solving the present one properly.

The food crisis is one that has existed for many years; typically attracting world attention when large numbers of people die (e.g. during famines) while the fact that over one billion people suffer from undernutrition on a daily basis continues to be a silent emergency. Reports emerging from Ethiopia in September 2009 highlighted the failure of the rains and the need to provide food assistance to five million additional individuals in addition to the eight million already receiving such assistance. The situation appears equally serious in Somalia and parts of Eritrea, Uganda, Tanzania, Southern Sudan and the Central African Republic with severe drought followed by a failure of staple crops such as maize and rice.²² I fear that the response from the international community now and in the future will be virtually the same as in previous years. United Nations agencies, in particularly the World Food Programme, UNDP and UNICEF, together with influential organisations such as OXFAM will appeal to rich country governments for funds to provide emergency assistance. The amounts available will perhaps prevent a large-scale loss of lives, but very little will be done to tackle the underlying causes of vulnerability of peoples and countries in Africa to famine. And next year or the year after, another drought will result in equally large if not larger numbers of people in need of food aid. The seriousness of the problem is reflected in the World Development Report 2010 (World Bank 2009b) which discusses in detail world hunger and the impact of

recurrent and frequent droughts and the financial crisis on food and water insecurity. As the report highlights, in order 'to avoid encroaching into already-stressed ecosystems, societies will have to almost double the existing rate of agricultural productivity growth while minimizing the associated environmental damage' (ibid., 133). Related to these are the enormous challenges ahead related to the politics of food trade, food buffers, food distribution and water sharing and allocation. But as the report highlights, we can try to scale up what we currently know to be approaches that are promising for farmers and good for the environment such as 'zero tillage', which, although it has been applied largely in high-income countries, is also being increasingly practised in India and Brazil.

THE CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

The third crisis – related to global warming and climate change – has of late captured global attention in a major way. While champions of the environment agenda have for long tried to convince, without much success, the world of the impending perils of our modern way of life, the recent attention accorded to global warming and climate change is astonishing. There is now little doubt that the earth's climate is changing and will continue to change. Indeed, there appears to be relatively widespread consensus that global temperatures will on average continue to increase and this will have a considerable (and adverse) impact on availability of rainfall for agriculture and water for drinking in addition to contributing to rising sea levels with potentially dangerous consequences in the form of increased frequency of various types of natural disasters such as hurricanes, storms, floods, droughts and heat waves. Global warming is also expected to have negative effects on crop and livestock production patterns and humans will face greater risks of malnutrition and disease. As I discuss in chapter 6, it is also increasingly being accepted worldwide that while developing countries have not been the major contributors to the current problem, they will nonetheless be among the most affected.

Of the three crises discussed thus far, it appears that this crisis is the one that has got politicians across the globe to at least talk about combating vulnerability to climate change. Hence, there is now widespread talk of 'adaptation' (building resilience to climate change) and 'mitigation'

(moving towards low carbon societies). Despite this, however, climate change is still being largely communicated in the media and political circles as a crisis that warrants our urgent action in terms of the need for a global climate change treaty. In contrast, there is less appreciation of the daily vulnerabilities and the weak adaptive capacity that characterise the lives of the poor at local levels. Thus it appears that there is a large gap between global ambitions and local realities and, as I discuss in chapter 6, if we cannot successfully implement environmentally friendly policies at local levels, when the benefits to the population are obvious – then it will indeed be a tall order to expect major impacts at the global level. There is hence a need to focus on disaggregating the overall effects of climate change and to study closely the socio-economic impacts and how they may be addressed. In this context, we need to appreciate that for the poor, recovery from a shock (e.g. in the form of a climate change-induced natural disaster) is usually slow and hence we must work towards reducing vulnerability to climate change by improving risk management (TFESSD 2008). Thus we need to better understand the various types of risks and shocks that the poor continually face and how such events and processes affect their lives. The same applies to global solutions on adaptation and mitigation that may have adverse and perhaps unintended impacts on the lives of the poor at the local level.

ADDRESSING VULNERABILITY

Thus far I have argued that we have a tendency to focus on sensational crises rather than understanding and doing something about vulnerability that recurrently produces such crises in the first place. But what is vulnerability and why should we focus more on it? Vulnerability is often used to refer to ‘the relationship between poverty, risk, and efforts to manage risk’ (Alwang, Siegel and Jørgensen 2001, 1). But it variously signifies defencelessness, insecurity, and exposure to risk, shocks and stress. Vulnerability is forward-looking in that there may be a likelihood of ‘experiencing a loss in the future relative to some benchmark of welfare’ and the loss of future welfare is ‘caused by uncertain events’ (ibid.). The extent to which a household is affected by vulnerability is determined by the nature of the risk and the household’s ability to launch an ap-

appropriate response. There are several very good reasons (or value-added) for re-focusing our efforts on tackling vulnerability but the most important reason is that most poor households identify vulnerability to be an important explanation of their continued poverty. As Dercon (2005, 1) observes, ‘risk does not just result in variability in living standards. There is increasing evidence that the lack of means to cope with risk and vulnerability is in itself a cause of persistent poverty and poverty traps’. And defencelessness in turn can be interpreted as a function of social marginalization that ultimately results in economic marginalization (Kanbur and Squire 2001).²³ The concept of vulnerability is further important for thinking about forward-looking anti-poverty interventions in that ‘it is necessary to go beyond a cataloguing of who is currently poor, how poor they are and why they are poor to an assessment of the vulnerability of households to poverty – who is likely to be poor, how likely are they to be poor, how poor are they likely to be, and why they are likely to be poor’ (Chaudhuri 2003, 3). A focus on vulnerability also allows us to highlight the distinction and balance between ex-ante poverty prevention measures (i.e. taking action to reduce the impact of risk) and ex-post poverty alleviation interventions (i.e. transfers to the poor when they are faced with a bad shock). Despite the above, however, vulnerability as a concept is relatively ignored when designing anti-poverty policy.

Vulnerability as a term has attracted widespread interest across a range of disciplines. The following three categories of development literature have typically recognised the importance of risk in explaining poverty and deprivation: the fertility literature, which has traditionally argued that high infant and child mortality increases fertility rates; the agricultural economics literature, with its focus on preferences towards risk, particularly risk aversion; and the nutrition/food security literature which has documented that poor nutrition in particular periods in a child’s life may lead to long term effects such as stunting and proneness to disease (Dercon 2005, 11–12). In addition to these, vulnerability is considered an important variable in livelihoods approaches and also increasingly in studies of climate change although more needs to be done on clarifying the link between vulnerability and adaptation. Some have also argued – particularly with reference to issues of food insecurity – that the space of vulnerability can be identified

as a tripartite structure – entitlement (command over food), empowerment or enfranchisements (state-civil society relations seen in political and institutional terms) and political economy (structural-historical form of class relations within a specified political economy, i.e. surplus appropriation and crisis proneness) (Watts and Bohle 1993, 121).

Vulnerability can be of various types and we need to understand how they are related and how they cause small and major crises. In terms of the discussion on the crises thus far, one can easily locate vulnerabilities in relation to say a food crisis by isolating various parts of a long process or chain of events that ultimately lead to food shortage, starvation and perhaps even famine. Take the example of the typical types of shocks that large numbers of individuals faced in rural Ethiopia in the period 1999–2004. These included drought, illness or death of household head or spouse, inability to sell outputs or decreases in output prices, pests or diseases that affected crops and livestock, crime and policy/political shocks that included land redistribution, state confiscation of assets, resettlement, forced contributions or arbitrary taxation (Dercon 2005, 5). Rather than waiting for a crisis to erupt, specific interventions can be targeted at vulnerable individuals and households that attempt to combat some or all of the specific shocks. This will, of course, require not only good and credible information but also a genuine commitment on the part of political and administrative authorities to reduce and eliminate various types of vulnerabilities. Another case, that of Senegal, which imports over 80 per cent of its requirements of rice from East Asia, helps illustrate both macro-level and micro-level vulnerabilities. Because of its dependency on such exports, the country is extremely vulnerable to variations in the price of rice at international market. And at the height of the food crisis in 2008, rice importers worried that given the weak purchasing power of the local population, they would not be able to sell their stocks since they had imported the rice at a high cost. With the help of government subsidies, however, the lack of demand was addressed and the 2008 problem did not materialise into a major crisis. However, the root causes of the country's dependence on rice imports has not been addressed and it remains equally if not more vulnerable to the same problem in 2009 as in the previous year.

Based on a review of the literature on vulnerability, there are five sets of issues that appear both interesting and relevant in this context and require further clarification and attention. First, there is a continued fuzziness surrounding the concept of vulnerability. As Burg (2008, 613) writes, ‘specifically, there is some confusion as to whether vulnerability itself is the phenomenon to be apprehended, or whether it is something that exacerbates the effects of hazards, and this relationship is what needs to be understood’. Second, it appears that differences in approaches to understanding vulnerability among different disciplines (where each discipline focuses on different components of risks, household responses, etc.) may lead to different methods of measuring and combating vulnerability. We therefore need to understand to what extent such approaches take attention away from a more holistic approach in development interventions. Third, we need to better understand how we can best balance ex-ante measures (taking action to reduce the impact of risk) and ex-post measures (transfers to the poor when they are faced with a bad shock). Fourth, we need to focus on opportunities that the poor have to insure themselves against risks. Hence, we need to examine the role of public action in fostering more insurance and mechanisms to protect the poor. Fifth and finally, we need to address concerns relating to the separation of risk evaluation on the one hand and risk reduction on the other; i.e. the difference between science and political decision which in turn leads to doubts over the effectiveness of risk management. And related to this is the lack of consciousness and responsibility regarding vulnerability among political and administrative authorities and sometimes even communities themselves (Cardona 2003). Most importantly the *process* by which vulnerability is created, maintained and exacerbated needs focus, so as to allow us to intervene at an early stage based on a correct diagnosis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I have explained how the five sets of topics that I discuss in the ensuing chapters of this book – corruption, democracy, human rights, climate change and development aid – are related to each other.

Indeed, there are three sets of overarching issues that the remaining chapters have in common. These include the general unwillingness and reluctance of the development community to focus adequate attention on the factors that explain the resilience and continued production of poverty and inequality. There is thus an attempt to promote development without recognising that there are simultaneously other (often powerful) actors who continue to produce, and benefit, from poverty; and the fear of local elites of losing their privileges in some foreseeable future. Similarly, understanding the motivations that explain the pursuit of wealth by individuals and groups also helps to better understand the continuation of unfair trade relations and the unfair arrangements upon which international institutions operate. Being blind to issues of inequality is, in my view, one of the major reasons as to why development continues to remain elusive. Two other sets of issues explain the elusive agenda. There is a fixation, which we currently witness in the development vocabulary, on a set of buzzwords which gain attention for a while amidst claims that various development actors have finally found an approach that will radically change both the foundations of development policy and its implementation. Even if the theoretical foundations of such approaches are sound, there is far too little attention given to how these can be operationalised on the ground in various country contexts. Adding to the problem is the practice whereby development actors may say one thing in public (e.g. extolling the virtues of 'empowerment' and 'human rights') but do something quite the opposite in practice when they set priorities for their political and organisational agendas or when they get distracted by crises. As the discussion on economic empowerment of women showed, our understanding of problems can be very different from that of the poor. There are numerous success stories that we can learn from and try to adapt to newer settings without necessarily trying to coin yet another fancy terminology or approach. Finally, as I have argued in the final sections, the current focus on the financial, food and climate crises has unfortunately taken our attention away from focusing on the root causes of poverty and recognising the importance of vulnerability in creating one crisis after another. If we are to avoid recurrent crises in the future, our attention should instead be directed

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at recognising, understanding and addressing the strong bonds between vulnerability and crises. Indeed, our tendency to avoid tackling the really complex issues – either because they are too complex, challenging and/or expensive – is what explains why development continues to be elusive for large numbers of people in poor countries.

THE USUAL SUSPECT

Corruption is generally recognised to be a problem in most countries of the world and is typically used in a negative sense in order to convey a message of disapproval and condemnation. Moreover, anyone dealing with public administration in developing countries (or public affairs in general) is bound to encounter the statement that ‘everything is corrupt’. Taxi drivers, fruit sellers, bureaucrats, diplomats, NGO and aid agency representatives, United Nations and World Bank officials and even politicians would tell you that corruption is at the heart of the problem of underdevelopment in that part of the world. Corruption is thus portrayed to be the usual suspect and although such blunt statements may rarely be further elaborated upon, the message is unequivocally straightforward. It is most often a simple theory explaining complex political and administrative phenomena, most often without much empirical evidence. Being by definition occult, corruption is far too often substantiated by hearsay and guesses, or by the ubiquitous ‘top of the iceberg’ metaphor. Moreover, in the abundant literature on malpractices and corruption in developing countries there is seldom an attempt to distinguish between the different forms they may take. There is thus a tempting tendency to lump all corruption phenomena into one category, irrespective of whether they, for instance, reflect individual or collective transactions, or whether they are direct or indirect. This makes it difficult to isolate the source of the problem and to undertake concrete measures to combat it.

Corruption as a topic in the development jargon has grown in importance since the early 1990s, particularly after the end of the Cold War. As Williams (1999, 487) observes: 'The geo-political rationale which had once been used to support corrupt dictators who were overtly anti-Communist disappeared and, together with donor fatigue, a re-evaluation of the need to combat corruption became more politically attractive.' And it is now widely accepted that corruption in developing countries has an adverse effect on economic development and reduces the resources necessary for infrastructure, public services and anti-poverty programmes. Corruption is said to undermine economic growth, discourage foreign investment and reduce the resources necessary for infrastructure, public services and anti-poverty programmes (Robinson 1998). Further, corruption can also weaken the legitimacy and accountability of governments and thereby undermine political institutions (Johnston 1997). But there are also others who view corruption as being an important catalyst in promoting economic growth and combating the cumbersome role played by the political and administrative systems in developing countries that often create unnecessary delays and hence prevent the speedy implementation of development-oriented projects.

Despite a revival in academic interest on corruption in recent years, I am often surprised to see the paucity of empirical work, particularly in trying to connect with specific problems of development policy. It is therefore far too common and rather easy to assign corruption the entire blame for the lack of development of a particular country or region. Given the trust most people have in the ills of corruption, there may not even be an attempt to look for alternative explanations that are causing the problems. In this essay I therefore argue that while corruption is indeed a major social evil, we need to go beyond impressionistic understandings for the phenomenon in order to understand why development remains elusive. Indeed, we need more empirically-based studies on corruption from different local contexts rather than operating with the idea of corruption being similar in all parts of the world and in all contexts. Most importantly, it is important to locate corruption within a wider context of the implementation of public policy and my general conclusion is that while corruption is invariably an important factor

explaining policy failure, it is by no means always the dominant factor. After an examination of the various forms of corruption and followed by an overview of some widely used definitions and theoretical approaches, I focus on the relationship between corruption and development. In particular, I discuss the methodological challenges in researching corruption with examples from fieldwork on drought and starvation undertaken in India almost a decade ago. The aim is to contribute to an improved process-oriented understanding of the relationship between corruption, development and the implementation of public policy in developing countries.

THE PHENOMENON

In common parlance, the term 'corruption' is used to describe a wide variety of human acts. And such acts vary; its nature may, for example, depend on whether politicians or bureaucrats take the lead and whether societal interest groups are actively a part of a system of patronage and clientelism (Hutchcroft 1997). Corruption is often categorised into three main categories: incidental (individual), institutional (e.g. a particular government department) and systemic (societal). As Robinson (1998, 3) notes, 'Some forms of corruption may be confined to instances of malfeasance on the part of individual politicians or public officials, and are episodic rather than systemic'. In other instances, 'corruption pervades particular institutions or sectors of activity' (ibid.). Finally, systemic corruption 'is a situation in which major institutions and processes of the state are routinely dominated and used by corrupt individuals and groups, and in which many people have few practical alternatives of dealing with corrupt officials' (Johnston 1998, 89).

Apart from the above three categories, it is also useful to briefly reflect on other distinctions of corruption. Heidenheimer et al. (1989) distinguish between 'petty corruption' (meagre monetary gain or an official bending rules to do a friend a favour, usually involving low-level civil servants); 'routine corruption' (including the acceptance of gifts, nepotism, etc.); and 'aggravated corruption' (involving kickbacks from major contracts and organised crime). In certain cases corrup-

tion is initiated by an office-holder while in other cases a corrupt act is initiated and encouraged by a favour-seeker (*ibid.*). A further crucial distinction needs to be made between 'direct' and 'indirect' forms of (or gains from) corruption. Direct corruption relates primarily to immediate gains from 'bribery, extortion and misuse of official information' while indirect corruption entails 'indirect bribes' such as promises of employment (including appointment to a prestigious position), promotion and transfers or, goods and services at reduced prices or the awarding of contracts to certain favoured individuals or groups (Pinto-Duschinsky 1985, 164).

At the outset, it is also useful to briefly examine a few corruption-related concepts which add to the difficulty in arriving at a universally accepted definition of corruption and which may not be directly related to corruption *per se*. Consider the term 'bribe', which is intrinsically related to corruption; indeed, for many bribery appears to be synonymous with corruption. 'Bribery' involves the 'payment of a fixed sum, a certain percentage of a contract, or any other favour in money or kind paid to the state official in charge of making contracts on behalf of the state' or the distribution of 'benefits to companies or individuals, businessmen and clients' (Amundsen 1999, 11). Bribery is often understood to be a form of redistributive corruption and is often associated with equivalent terms such as 'kickbacks' (large amounts as a reward for facilitating a contract between two agencies), 'baksheesh' (a form of gratuity given for a favourable service in South Asia), 'grease money' and 'pay-offs'. While bribes may be paid in order to speed things up in the bureaucracy or in the hope of expecting a favourable decision (so-called speed money), it can also assume the form of an 'extraction' that officials charge for their services, including the receipt of gifts and 'donations' (often termed as 'rent-seeking behaviour').¹ For example, Rose-Ackerman (1999, 92–93) highlights the subtle but crucial distinction between the closely related concepts of 'bribes', 'gifts', 'prices' and 'tips'. She characterises payments (monetary or in kind) along two dimensions: whether there exists an explicit *quid pro quo* (reciprocal obligations) and 'the institutional positions of payers and payees' (whether they are principals or agents).

TABLE 1: *Bribery and related terms*

	Quid pro quo	No explicit quid pro quo
Payment to principal	Price	Gift
Payment to agent	Bribe	Tip

Source: Rose-Ackerman (1999, 93).

Corruption is often used interchangeably with related terms such as embezzlement, extortion, fraud, favouritism and nepotism. Thus, and although debatable, ‘embezzlement’ is typically not considered to be a corrupt act from a legalistic aspect as it involves ‘theft of public resources by public officials’ and constitutes the misappropriation of public or private (company) funds (Amundsen 1999, 11). There is much more agreement on the fact that ‘extortion’ is a corrupt act entailing the extraction of money or other resources by the use and/or threat of force and violence. Such forms of corruption are usually classified as ‘redistributive’ extraction as they involve a transfer of resources from state to society and so-called ‘protection money’ demanded by mafia groups is a case in point. However, such acts could also be classified as being ‘extractive’ corruption when the entire state machinery is perceived to be riddled with corruption. Another interesting term is ‘fraud’, which is a broad legal term and includes ‘trickery, swindle or deceit’, entailing both ‘bribery’ and ‘embezzlement’. By entailing the accumulation of benefits with the help of deceit and swindle, fraud is another example of ‘extractive corruption’ (ibid.).

Finally, ‘favouritism’ entails favouring friends, family or others and involves ‘a mechanism of power abuse implying “privatisation” and a highly biased distribution of state resources, no matter how these resources have been accumulated in the first place’ (Amundsen 1999, 14). Hence, favouritism is closely linked to collective and extractive forms of corruption (of, for instance, neopatrimonial regimes) when it implies abuse of power ‘in the form of a corrupted (undemocratic, “privatised”) *distribution* of resources, whereas corruption strictly defined is about the *accumulation* of resources’. Closely related to favouritism is ‘nepotism’ where ‘an office

holder (ruler) with the right to make appointments, prefers to nominate to prominent positions his proper kinfolk and family members' (ibid.).

In this context, Bowles (1999, 460) rightly argues that, 'The essence of corruption is that two individuals or groups act in concert to further their own interests at the expense of a third party'. By comparison, fraud and extortion involve 'an individual or group acting unilaterally to further their own interests at the expense of others', and hence may not necessarily be termed as corruption since there is no identifiable third party. However, Bowles provides an example of a grey area in which two parties may collude to commit a fraud and this may have considerable ramifications. One relates to a doctor-patient relationship where the two collude against the insurance company to inflate treatment costs or simply agree on the use of more costly procedures than is necessary. Such collusion may be considered corrupt by the insurance company only if the doctor benefits financially by prescribing more expensive treatment. If not, then the extra cost will probably be written off as an ordinary transaction or agency cost (ibid.).

It will be clear from the above discussion that defining what constitutes a corrupt act will vary from society to society and from situation to situation, depending on who is making the accusation and who is being accused. This is also where cultural differences become important as what is considered corrupt in Nicaragua (where theft is typically included in the definition of corruption) may not be considered so in Norway (where a strict legalistic definition is applied and where theft is seen to be a separate phenomenon). Similarly, it has now become commonplace for private companies to practice so-called 'corporate hospitality' which may take the form of providing certain selected individuals with access to benefits and/or services that they would not otherwise have. This may include funding foreign trips (often disguised as study tours), golf lessons and other all-expenses paid services. The purpose, at least from the company's viewpoint, is that the recipients of such generosity will be interested in maintaining a close relationship that in turn may be useful in future company-related business. However, such acts will most often only be termed corrupt when the recipient does something illegally to favour the agent offering such hospitality. And such return favours may

not always be easy to identify and may be undertaken subtly and gradually over a considerable period of time.

Other similar everyday examples of blurred boundaries between honest and corrupt include cases when A gets much better service by providing an extra monetary or other incentive to B who is an employee of company C. The company does not gain anything from this act; the benefit is appropriated individually. A typical case in many poor countries involves paying the postman to make sure that letters actually are delivered in the letterbox or the garbage collector who may suddenly refuse to collect household waste. However, there may be perfectly honest reasons for giving a tip to a waitress for a good service, a feature that may even be encouraged by the owners of the restaurant.

In short, corruption is not only widespread in large parts of the developing world, but it also exists in many variants. Even if we may agree on what is corruption, there will invariably remain many grey areas where arriving at consensus will remain fraught with difficulty. And Johnston (2000, 8) rightly observes that the crucial issue is not what corruption means but who decides what it means and how widely such a decision is accepted in society.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS

As the above discussion illustrates, the literature on corruption is quite voluminous and arriving at a single definition of corruption that accurately identifies all possible cases is very difficult indeed. One of the most prolific writers on the topic, Michael Johnston (1998, 89) observes, 'No issue is more enduring than the corruption debate, and none has so frequently pre-empted promising discussions, as that of definitions'. The challenge is amplified when one considers that social customs and cultural traditions (e.g. gift giving and doing personal favours in exchange for a reward as opposed to providing moral support) may encourage acts that are not in conformity with the letter of the law (Klitgaard 1991; Bowles 1999). Despite such difficulties, and in a pioneering study, Heidenheimer et al. (1989) categorise the various definitions of corruption into three categories – public-centred, market-centred and public-interest-centred.

The first category – *public-centred* – sees corruption as essentially a deviation from the legal norms associated with public office. Johnston (1998, 89) provides a popular starting point definition of corruption as ‘the abuse of public roles or resources for private benefit’. Thus corruption includes the misuse of authority for personal gain, monetary or non-monetary (Bayley 1966). Nye (1967, 417–419) defines corruption more precisely in terms of ‘behaviour which deviates from formal duties of public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private cliques), pecuniary or status gains’ or behaviour like bribery, nepotism or misappropriation that ‘violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence’. The main advantage of the public-centred approach is one of ‘relative precision’ in that it clearly identifies certain behaviour as being corrupt (Johnston 1996) and ‘approximates the definition of corruption given in the law’ (Pavarala 1996, 60). The difficulties arising out of such definitions relate primarily to the fact that they often tend to dichotomise the phenomenon in corrupt or non-corrupt terms (Kjellberg 1992). As a result, numerous types of possibly corrupt behaviour may escape such a legal definition. For example, laws in a society may be vague or contradictory and they may (and do often) change over time and vary from country to country. In addition, Pinto-Duschinsky (1996, 142) notes that the implementation of judicial norms is often complicated since what is legally forbidden may be socially accepted and vice-versa. One can also question whether judicial norms are neutral, objective and non-political (Williams 1999) and how one should deal with the indirect nature that often characterises certain types of corrupt behaviour (Kjellberg 1992). For these very reasons, Scott (1972, 5) observes that corrupt behaviour should also ‘cover the wilful failure to act in accordance with the formal duties of a public role’.

Market-centred definitions of corruption are primarily concerned with economic concepts of demand, supply and exchange, focusing on rent-seeking behaviour. Thus when a civil servant ‘regards his public office as a business, the income of which he will, in the extreme case, seek to maximize’ then such an office ‘becomes a ‘maximizing unit’. And the size of such income will depend on ‘the market situation and his talents for finding the point of maximal gain on the public’s demand curve’ (Van

Klaveren 1989, 26). Another prominent advocate of the market-centred approach is Rose-Ackerman (1996) who argues that corruption exists at the interface of public and private sectors. And levels of malfeasance depend ‘not only on the volume of potential benefits, but also on the riskiness of corrupt deals and on the participants’ moral scruples and bargaining power’. She goes on to forcibly argue that private firms, for instance, pay bribes for two reasons – to obtain government benefits (especially when the government is a buyer or a contractor) and to avoid costs (payment for a favourable interpretation of rules and in order to avoid delay and harassment by government officials). In general, such market-centred approaches to explaining corruption have the advantage of highlighting the incentives (‘rent-seeking’ behaviour) that influence the extent (or amount) and the situations (risks) of corrupt transactions in a particular context. However, Johnston (1996) is of the view that such explanations ‘overlook the intangible benefits (prestige, promises of political support) that can flow from the abuse of authority’. In addition, he argues that ‘the “market” for official favours can be complex and idiosyncratic: demand for official services may be inelastic, highly individualised (as in cases of cronyism), and far in excess of supply’. Similarly, Williams (1999, 507) argues that the real focus of this approach is ‘not on defining corruption but on explaining the economic imperatives and political circumstances which encourage breaches of the rules and norms of public office’.

The third set of definitions categorised by Heidenheimer et al. (1989) are *public-interest-centred definitions*, which are usually very broad and address both the nature and consequences of corruption together with an entire set of societal norms. This approach focuses on corruption as ‘one of several forms of persuasion exercised in approaching a person in public office’ such as an appeal to ideology, party/group affiliation, needs of interest groups, gender, age, geographic location, etc. (Kjellberg 1992, 202). A typical understanding of corruption within this approach is provided by Friedrich (1966, 74) who argues that a ‘pattern of corruption’ exists ‘whenever a powerholder who is charged with doing certain things, i.e. who is a responsible functionary or officeholder, is by monetary or other rewards not legally provided for, induced to take actions which

favor whoever provides the rewards and thereby does damage to the public and its interests'.² Similarly Rogow and Lasswell (1963)³ argue that 'a corrupt act violates responsibility toward at least one system of public or civic order and it is in fact compatible with (destructive of) any such system'. And since 'a system of public or civic order exalts common interest over special interest; violations of the common interest for special advantage are corrupt'. Such broad conceptualisations of the 'public interest', although morally valuable and going beyond narrow legalistic definitions, articulate an 'abstract, amorphous morality, and lists a large number of acts under the category of corruption' (Pavarala 1996, 64). These may include gift giving, nepotism, cheating/fraud, lying, and lobbying – acts which are difficult to measure or prove, and in many cases are considered to be a natural part of a socio-political system. Moreover, defining what constitutes public interest or common good is a challenging proposition in any society and this further aggravates the difficulty of arriving at a general definition of corruption that can be analytically useful for purposes of comparison between different societies and cultures. Indeed, as Johnston (1996) puts it, even if it were possible to identify the public interest with some precision, it is far more useful to distinguish between the definition of corruption on the one hand and its consequences on the other.

The above discussion illustrates the enormous difficulty in arriving at a universally accepted definition of corruption. A corrupt act in Norway may not necessarily constitute the same in Nicaragua and vice versa.⁴ Indeed, although all three categories of definitions highlight essential components of corruption, certain questions remain unanswered, particularly those pertaining to the norms to distinguish between corrupt and non-corrupt acts. And even though they help to identify specific patterns and consequences of corruption, it is questionable whether such approaches are as precise and objective as they claim to be. The difficulty is aptly summed up by Johnston (1996), for whom such claims of precision and objectivity are 'illusory' since 'the powers and limitations of official roles, and their relationships with private interests, are constantly being contested and reinterpreted, even in relatively settled systems'. As discussed earlier, a widely popular definition – and one actively used by

several multinational actors – is a legalistic one provided by Johnston that views corruption as ‘the abuse of public roles or resources for private benefit’. However, even in this case, what constitutes ‘abuse’, ‘public role’, ‘resource’ and ‘private benefit’ may again vary from situation to situation and from one cultural context to another. Nonetheless, such a definition provides a useful starting point, no matter how narrow it may appear at the outset. It is at least better to have a barest minimum definition of corruption at hand rather than having to sift through a maze of concepts, terms and definitions.

THE CORRUPTION-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

There has been considerable academic interest in recent years on the relationship between corruption and development, and the issue has attracted increasing interest with the introduction of democracy and economic liberalisation in many developing countries. Some have argued that democratisation has led to a direct increase in corruption as democratic polities can increase the incentives and opportunities for corrupt acts. There are others who feel that democratic institutions actually possess a genuine capacity to detect, reduce and contain the incidence of corruption (Robinson 1998). Similarly, while some argue that economic liberalisation and the subsequent removal of the licence-control systems limit rent-seeking behaviour among bureaucrats and politicians, others like Harriss-White and White (1996) highlight the fact that liberalisation merely displaces corrupt behaviour to other actors and areas of government activity. The real impetus for the corruption-development link, however, arrived with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) focus on the term ‘good governance’ towards the end of the 1990s. Although the idea of good governance has of late been somewhat nuanced by these actors – in that there is now more focus on political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, quality of public services functioning of the civil service, quality of regulatory policies and rule of law issues – a focus on anti-corruption has always been the main focus. Consequently there was growing concern that the effective implementation of development policy is made difficult when ‘regula-

tions and bureaucratic allocation of scarce public resources breed corruption' (Bardhan 1997, 1335). Of particular concern in the late 1990s was the continuation of so-called 'patrimonialism', particularly in large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. And patrimonial administrations, with unclear public-private boundaries, were viewed as breeding grounds for the illegitimate 'private appropriation of the spoils of office in the form of taxes, customs, gifts, land and the like' (Theobald 1999, 492).

Most authors seem to argue that corruption has adverse effects on bureaucratic efficiency together with a negative influence on investment and growth (Bardhan 1997; Robinson 1998). As Leff (1964) notes, the logic of such an argument is: development – bureaucracy – efficiency – probity. Rose-Ackerman (1996), for instance, writes of inefficiency, delays and deterioration in quality when contractors make payoffs to be allowed to cut corners'. Consider the case of the private contractor/businessperson in a rural area who competes for government contracts along with competitors for the construction of a stretch of road. He may wish to influence the bidding process by offering and paying a bribe. Alternatively, he could also be asked to pay a bribe by an official. How does the contractor make up for the additional expenses incurred in the payment of a bribe? He constructs the road but perhaps uses cheaper or lesser material than required. The road lasts for only a few months, which is followed by a renewed process of bidding for contracts and offers and/or demands for bribes. It is often suggested that corruption 'reduces private market efficiency by creating frictions that inhibit private sector investment' and therefore corruption is described as being 'sand in the wheels' (Waller et al., 17). At first glance, it seems relatively straightforward that the greater the practice of corruption in society, the greater the rise in the price of administration. From a public point of view, if corruption takes the form of a kickback given to government officials, it diminishes the total amount expended for public purposes. Consider the following from Bayley (1966):

A corrupt act represents a failure to achieve the objectives government sought when it established criteria for decisions of various classes. To the extent that the objectives sought were worthwhile, corrupt acts exact a

cost in nonachievement. For example, if the objective of hiring government employees is the obtaining of efficiency and ability in carrying out official tasks, then corruption in appointments produces inefficiency and waste. (Bayley 1966, 724–725)

However, this is not always the case. Many argue that corruption can actually improve efficiency in situations where the system is replete with pervasive and cumbersome regulations. This is borne out by a comment by Leff (1964, 11)⁵ who writes: ‘if the government has erred in its decision, the course made possible by corruption may well be the better one’. The main point here is that corruption is often the only way to get the system moving with the purpose of accomplishing certain specific objectives. Without a corrupt intervention, certain systems cannot be pushed forward. According to this strand of thinking, corruption ‘greases the wheels’. Huntington (1968, 386), for instance, writes, ‘in terms of economic growth, the only thing worse than a society with a rigid, over-centralized, dishonest bureaucracy is one with a rigid, over-centralized, honest bureaucracy’. Hence, in certain contexts where rules and regulations are rigid, do not encourage flexibility and lead to delays, corruption can improve efficiency and help growth in the form of ‘speed money’. Gunnar Myrdal (1968), writing on the Indian context notes that this may not necessarily be the case. Rather than speeding up the process, corrupt officials may be more inclined to create administrative delays in order to encourage clients to offer bribes. Similarly, Banerjee (1994)⁶ writes of situations where bureaucrats actively create red tape in order to screen different categories of clients in the hope of attracting more bribes.

A further question is interesting at this stage. In the quest for development, are certain forms of corruption better (preferred) than others? Bardhan (1997) raises the issue of the centralisation of bribery and its potential impact on overall economic development. Citing India and Indonesia as examples, he writes:

... the two countries are about equally corrupt, and yet the economic performance by most accounts has been much better in Indonesia. Could it be that Indonesian corruption is more centralized ... and thus somewhat

predictable, whereas in India it is a more fragmented, often anarchic, system of bribery? (Bardhan 1997, 1325)

This is a difficult question to answer. Waller et al. (2000, 22) conclude that ‘if corruption is measured by the amount of bribes paid per investment project, then centralizing corruption at the top of the government may lead to a more efficient allocation of corruption.’ This, since ‘the top level of governmental hierarchy has many tools at its disposal to ensure that this outcome prevails’ (ibid.). On the other hand, ‘if corruption is measured at the total volume of bribes paid in the economy, then centralizing bribe decisions at the top of the hierarchy leads to more corruption in the economy even though there is a larger private sector in this corruption regime’ (ibid.).

Corruption is also said to undermine political legitimacy. Rose-Ackerman (1996) notes that, ‘Systematic corruption undermines the legitimacy of governments, especially in democracies, where it can even lead to coups by undemocratic leaders’. Similarly, Bayley (1966) writes of how corruption lowers respect for government authority as it ‘undercuts popular faith in government to deal even-handedly’. Consequently, the common man may feel justified in being corrupt himself when he suspects that virtually everyone in power is embroiled in corrupt practices. Gupta (1995, 386) writes of the case of a local bus conductor in an Indian state who justifies not returning loose change to a passenger purchasing a ticket: ‘If Rajiv Gandhi can take 64 crore in bribes, what is the harm in my taking 64 paisa on a ticket?’⁷ Corruption can also have an infectious influence on other members of the administrative apparatus. For instance, a revenue inspector or a customs officer may join his/her colleagues in a corrupt network, partly to please (or not offend) fellow workers and/or partly to avoid undue harassment and obstacles in daily work. It could easily be a case of: ‘If you are not for us we take it that you are against us’. If an individual officer is not a part of the ‘gang’, he/she may risk being isolated professionally since he/she can be seen as a potential ‘whistle-blower’.

In *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistle-Blower*, Michela Wrong (2009) recounts the experiences of John Githongo – a journalist and former Transparency International investigator, who in January

2003 was given charge of heading Kenya's anti-corruption authority and made Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics by the first democratically elected President of the country, Mwai Kibaki. For two years, Githongo investigated various cases of bribery and fraud involving those who held some of the highest positions in Kenya, including senior cabinet ministers. After numerous threats where he was asked to stop his investigations, Githongo resigned his position in 2005 and turned whistle-blower. Subsequently he was forced to flee the country and he spent several years in exile in the United Kingdom, providing at the same time detailed information about the cases of corruption he had unearthed to several groups of actors. In addition to providing the material for Wrong's book, he contacted several multilateral and bilateral donor agencies. Interestingly, these donors who pride themselves in talking about anti-corruption at the slightest opportunity, did not react strongly enough. And Wrong suggests that the primary strategy of the donors – who at that time were thrilled to see an elected President in pace for the first time in 24 years – was to avoid taking decisions that would create a political or economic crisis. The result was token changes in Kenya's cabinet, but mostly business as usual.

Another recent example from Indonesia shows the powerful resistance the anti-corruption body – the Corruption Eradication Commission – is currently facing from high-ranking officials in the country, including the police and members of Parliament. After 32 years of President Suharto's rule, the country was widely regarded as one of the most corrupt in the world. However, since 2003, when the Commission was set up, some impressive progress has been achieved in fighting the problem in Indonesia. The Commission itself has prosecuted 86 cases related primarily to corruption involving the procurement of government contracts and has thus far enjoyed a 100 per cent conviction rate. However, with the prosecution of high-profile civil servants, politicians and businessmen, the Parliament, in particular, considered to be one of the most corrupt institutions in the country, is delaying the passing of new legislation that governs the Commission and the courts. Such developments, according to watchdog groups, do not bode well for Indonesia's fight against rampant corruption that continues to plague the country.⁸

THE 'HIGH NOON EFFECT'
AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

At this stage, it is important to mention the inherent difficulty in researching corruption, which is a sensitive and often secretive phenomenon. There are considerable methodological challenges involved, particularly in attempting to empirically link and generalise the impact of corrupt behaviour on activities relating to economic development. However, it helps to be ingenious and to look for indirect or mediated effects of corruption. Above all, it is important to understand how local actors, involved in the process as bribers, bribees or simply as passive observers, understand the problem. It is also important not to simply equate corruption with bribery since there may be other actions that may also constitute a corrupt act including vote fraud, nepotism, official theft and extended patronage systems (Johnston 2000, 21). Some central questions include the following. What is the nature of corruption discourse? Can we distinguish between different types of allegations of corruption? Who condemns corruption in a particular society? Why does an individual complain to friends about corruption and yet is inclined to offer a bribe in a secret transaction with a powerholder in order to further his own case? Should we not condemn both the person offering the bribe and the one receiving it? Most importantly, who are the losers of corruption and what types of strategies are available to them for redress? Finally, there are certain ethical dilemmas involved in researching corruption. When an informant or a group of people trust me (in my role as a researcher) with information regarding a corrupt act or a corrupt official, am I obligated to pass on the information to the relevant authorities? What if the authorities are themselves a part of such a transaction and end up punishing my informants instead of punishing the guilty party?

Estimates of corruption are usually imprecise and rumours rule instead of facts. It is difficult to estimate the true extent of corruption precisely because knowledge of such practices is limited and shrouded in secrecy. Hearsay, guesses and allegations (either based on some credible suspicion or with the intention of maligning a person one dislikes) are common in the Indian context. It is impossible to study public adminis-

tration in South Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa without coming across loose and unsubstantiated accusations of a general character: ‘He is corrupt’ or ‘He is *really* corrupt’ are phrases used to signify anything from incompetence and frustration at there not being any concrete and quick results to outright instances of corrupt behaviour. The situation is one that can be termed a ‘High Noon effect’ (based on the classic Western film ‘High Noon’),⁹ where the important thing is to beat a rival to the draw of the gun. It is almost as if the single most important thing, at least in political circles, is to accuse someone else of corruption before the other has the time to do the same. Whoever fires the first salvo usually benefits and the reputation of the person accused is questioned (and perhaps damaged) no matter whether it is later proven that such allegations were false. In contrast, when the accused retaliates by accusing the accuser of being corrupt, it is usually seen to be a case of ‘sour grapes’. This is a pattern often seen during campaigning for elections in many developing countries when ‘spicy’ stories are leaked to select newspapers and a scandal is set in motion. There are, for example, numerous instances of politicians in Malawi using newspapers they either own or control to malign their political opponents. The key aspect here is that corruption serves as a most effective tool to put forward an accusation and thereby generate suspicion regarding the moral character and consequently the motives a person may have to seek election to public office.

Corruption at the highest levels of politics and administration (‘grand corruption’ or ‘corruption of greed’) is a fact that most poor people take for granted. For example, after midterm elections had been held in Mexico in July 2009, and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) – that was voted out of power in 2000 on charges of massive corruption – won a landslide victory, the media debated the reasons behind the latest turnaround. And a pollster found to his amazement that there was in fact a ‘perverse nostalgia for past corruption’. Thus a juice vendor in Mexico City observed, ‘Yes, I admit the PRI is corrupt ... So we voted for the PAN [the opposition party], and they turned out to be just as corrupt ... They turned everything into their personal business’. Similar views were expressed by others who noted that despite being corrupt, the PRI tolerated a bending of the rules that allowed workers, particularly in the informal

economy (e.g. illegal street vendors and unlicensed taxi drivers), to earn their living. Hence, when faced with a choice between two corrupt parties, voters may feel justified in choosing the one that also helps their cause and eases their daily burdens.¹⁰

In certain situations, as I will discuss in subsequent sections, it is almost shameful or a sign of incompetence if a particular officer is not 'very good at being corrupt'. The ability to conceal outright corruption while at the same time sending out feelers that 'I can be approached with an offer', may be seen as a positive characteristic of an officer's personality. Such a person is a 'doer' and it is often more acceptable among the public to have a corrupt but efficient officer at the helm (i.e. a person able to carry out required improvements in development) than a corrupt (or for that matter an honest) but incompetent incumbent. Corruption is not only confined to the top echelons of the administration but is often said to pervade the entire structure ranging from the *peon* and clerks to junior officers. Some characterise corrupt behaviour within this group as resembling 'petty corruption' (involving minor personal gain) and/or corruption resulting from need (the fact that low level officials are poorly paid, etc.).

However, it is perhaps even more difficult to gauge the extent of corrupt transactions at the lower levels. Even though the average amount of money involved may be small, the enormous size of the typical developing country bureaucracy vis-à-vis other professions means that the figure could be just as high as those involving top-level officers. These low-level functionaries may occasionally be caught red-handed while accepting a bribe and their superiors may issue the customary temporary suspension order. A major challenge in such contexts is the lack of a credible threat of punishment and the 'casual and clumsy manner' in which corruption cases are often dealt with (Sondhi 2000). Thus those in power may seldom be willing to use their disciplinary powers for a variety of reasons, including pressure from trade unions, political leaders, fear of personal harm or harassment to family, overload of cases in the judiciary (cases take years to prosecute) or simply 'sheer inaptitude'. And the result of such (in)action is that 'the corrupt are rarely caught and even if caught are let off with minor or no penalties' (ibid., II).

DEVELOPMENTS IN A DISTRICT

One of India's most creditable achievements in the past five decades has been the prevention of famine. However, the food and nutritional security of a large portion of the Indian population, especially in rural and inaccessible areas, remains precarious. Elsewhere I have studied this paradox, and analysed India's impressive efforts in responding to sensational and easily visible disasters in contrast to the 'silent emergency' of drought-induced undernutrition and starvation deaths (Banik 2007). A primary goal was to understand why some issues are effectively dealt with and not others. The study was based on both quantitative and qualitative data in India at national, state and local levels as well as in-depth field visits to two states on India's east coast, Orissa and West Bengal. Among the issues examined were the interaction between specific institutions in India (e.g. judiciary, civil services, political parties) and their accountability to the public; the role of the media in highlighting problems of extreme poverty and destitution and the effectiveness of political and administrative response to such reports; and the impact of major anti-poverty programmes, including the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), in reducing the incidence, duration and impact of starvation deaths. In the ensuing sections of this essay, I will highlight the corruption-related aspects of the study.

THE CIRCUIT HOUSE CLUB

A crucial actor, highly visible in most district administration circles in India, is the 'local fixer' or a middleman. And in a certain district in the state of West Bengal, I met Sanjay,¹¹ a low-level clerk with a very friendly and jovial disposition. Sanjay turned out to be the classic example of an important local wheeler-dealer and fixer. He was a son of the soil, hailing from the district and appeared to be on good terms with virtually everyone and at all levels of society – from the caretaker of the 'Circuit House' (government guesthouse) to the District Magistrate, the administrative head of the district. Sanjay's immense popularity was also seen in the office of the 'Sahadipati' (the political head of the district) and a bitter rival of the District Magistrate. Sanjay seemed to transcend

party divisions and the political-administrative divide. On the very first day of my arrival at the Circuit House, I received a telephone call from Sanjay who told me, 'If you need anything... anything at all, please do not hesitate to contact me'. When I told him that I did not know who he was and wondered how he knew about my arrival, he told me half-jokingly, 'It is my business to know everything and everybody'. During the weeks I spent in this area, I was able to ascertain the true extent of power this clerk exercised. In the words of one of the caretakers of the Circuit House, who knew all the comings and goings of Ministers and bureaucrats:

Whenever we need to get anything done ... from any official paperwork in the Secretariat to a favour of any kind, we can always approach Sanjay-babu.¹² He is on friendly terms with everyone and has no enemies. He is really a wonderful man and there is no one like him in the district. He knows everyone and everyone knows him ... even different Prime Ministers who have visited the district call him by his first name ...

When the District Magistrate's friends and relatives arrived from Calcutta, Sanjay was the unofficial host, showing them around and taking care of all needs. The government-run Circuit House proved to be a very important arena for the cultivation of friendships and contacts, and a person like Sanjay was considerably dependent on tip-offs and information from his informants working in the Circuit House. These included cooks, caretakers, gardeners, night watchmen and cleaners. These workers were the ones who attended to telephone calls, kept a tab of who was meeting whom and overheard conversations that no one else had access to. A caretaker openly admitted to supplementing his meagre salary with 'demands of small amounts of money' from Sanjay and local businessmen, journalists and others interested in meeting a visiting politician, bureaucrat or police official residing at the Circuit House. If someone refused to pay, he/she would be curtly told that the minister/official did not wish to be disturbed. On their part, politicians and bureaucrats who frequented the Circuit House were also dependent on some of these employees for minor chores and for the facilitation of contacts. Thus

even low-level government employees enjoyed considerable influence and importance.

On several occasions, and in my presence, people approached Sanjay and requested a favour. He always seemed to give hope and reassurance: ‘Don’t worry. I will take care of it’. Apart from the Circuit House, the district headquarters was Sanjay’s kingdom and he did everything else apart from carrying out his designated and official work. Even though I cannot be sure that Sanjay made a lot of money from his activities (he appeared to live poorly in a shabby apartment), it was relatively clear that he was the master of public relations and always ‘knew something about somebody’, which could later be converted into favours for friends and clients. The surprising aspect of all this was that no one condemned his activities. Sanjay was usually spoken of as a ‘very helpful’, ‘kind’ and ‘understanding man’. He was obviously a person with an immense amount of social capital, who enjoyed the confidence of a wide-ranging group of people. This social capital, in turn, was used actively to facilitate favours, speed up administrative cases and bend rules for petty gain. Sanjay was, therefore, a typical intermediary and it was in his interest to spread and maintain the perception that without a bribe nothing worked.¹³

THE CLUB HOUSE CIRCUIT

This brings us to the issue of who among societal actors unearths and condemns corruption. Journalists represent an important group in that they, as representatives of a free media and in the public interest, have the responsibility of highlighting corrupt acts. They are often privy to confidential information, which they may or may not be able to publish. In most of India, one can distinguish between two types of journalists: relatively well-paid correspondents of national or local vernacular dailies stationed in the state capital and groups of poorly-paid local journalists (natives of the district) who function as local reporters for vernacular newspapers published from the state capital or another city. And virtually every major city in India has an ‘exclusive’ club (remnants of the colonial past) where select members of society are allowed privileged access to wine and dine and play billiards.

In a particular club in Bhubaneswar (the capital of the state of Orissa), I found that key bureaucrats, journalists and businessmen socialised openly – drinking whisky, gossiping, dining, playing billiards, etc. Politicians were in fact, conspicuous by their absence. The correspondents of national dailies and a select group of influential local journalists got most of their information about the workings of the state from important civil servants who frequented the club. There was seldom an attempt on the part of these correspondents to check out facts and actually visit some of the problem areas. There were also some allegations by some journalists who were not members of this club that in certain sensational cases (involving, for instance, an environmental disaster due to the carelessness of a government department or a private firm), key journalists could be ‘bought off’ in order to articulate a particularly one-sided and favourable version of the story. Rewards to journalists, in such situations, would often vary and could include the assignment of a spacious government bungalow in a posh part of the city, invitations to prestigious social gatherings, free entertainment at the club and/or a free supply of liquor. This brings me to the case of the civil servant, who is often alleged to be at the centre of corrupt transactions.

BUREAUCRATIC TRANSFERS AND ADMINISTRATIVE CORRUPTION

Officers of the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS) are subject to rapid and often arbitrary transfers from their posts throughout their careers.¹⁴ The power to transfer is often a relatively easy and useful tool for politicians to extract obedience and compliance since transfers offer the least lines of resistance and can enable the most pliant civil servants to be placed in key positions. It is also a symbolic gesture that politicians use to convey to the bureaucracy and the public that certain ‘preferred’ people have been put in charge of key posts. Moreover, a steadily increasing number of civil servants have actively sought the blessings of their political masters in order to save or promote their own careers. In the words of one senior official, ‘Large scale transfers are to place in position those who will unquestioningly obey their political mentors. For filling up “lucrative” posts, bids may even be invited!’¹⁵ Many political com-

mentators have consistently raised the issue of how such rapid transfers, without proper justification, have undermined administrative morale and self-confidence. These, in turn, are said to affect the professional competence of bureaucrats and make them insensitive to the needs of the people. As one bureaucrat put it, 'Transfer is such a potent instrument that it can make or break an official' (Prasada Rao 1997). By breaking up the networks of civil servants through the ability of 'directing' transfers, politicians ensure that they are 'keepers of the gap' in order to maintain the divide between state and community. Consequently, they are able to maintain an important source of patronage in the States (de Zwart 1994, 5). When civil servants are not obliging or 'accommodating' enough, a politician can record an adverse report in the confidential dossier of the officer concerned. In addition, the power of transfer is often used for purposes of harassment (Rao 1970; Jha 1988).¹⁶

An Indian civil servant (in this case, mainly IAS officers) may be transferred due to any of the following reasons: incompetence; disregard of organisational rules; incurring the wrath of an influential individual or a powerful lobby; for purposes of filling in a post left temporarily vacant; a transfer request on personal grounds. While transfers are a part of official routine, they can be punitive when used as political weapons. What is interesting is not the question of the suitability of transfers in Indian public administration but the political nature, frequency and scale with which these are ordered in many Indian States. That the problem is indeed acute is borne out of the remarks made by the Secretary of the Department of Personnel in New Delhi, who admitted that, 'the single most important reason for the demoralisation and sense of insecurity among the officers of the All India services is the frequent and arbitrary manner of transfers and postings in many States'.¹⁷

An exception to the impressionistic accounts and freewheeling discussions of Indian corruption is Wade (1982; 1985). He argues that 'it is partly that the frequency of transfer from post to post in India is typically so high as to make difficult any engagement between the official and his particular responsibilities; but it is also that the transfer mechanism allows pressures for 'corrupt' behaviour to bear down strongly on the incumbents of certain posts' (Wade 1985, 467). And the corruption 'sys-

tem', which is centred on control of personnel transfers, is an important supply-side reason for poor performance of canal-irrigated agriculture. Wade shows how officers can use their office to raise large amounts of illicit revenue, especially where some offices or posts are much more profitable than others. In many instances, illicit revenue collected at the field level is distributed along the higher ranks of the hierarchy such that a complex network of actors is involved. If an officer is unwilling to share some of this illicit revenue, obtained primarily from bribes, then the officer may be transferred to another post with highly undesirable conditions.¹⁸ According to the rules, officers must be transferred within three years, and can be transferred to any post within their department. Hence, the officers 'naturally want to influence their transfers in line with their preferences'. The main argument here is that a significant reason for why the Indian state is not better at promoting development is the 'corruption-transfer' mechanism and its effects on bureaucratic initiatives.

(One might) visualise a special circuit of transactions, in which the bureaucracy acquires control of funds, partly from the clients and partly from the State Treasury, channels these funds upwards to high ranks and politicians, the latter in turn using the funds for distributing short-term material inducements in exchange for electorate support. -- (This applies) to many, but not all departments ... the transfer being the corruption model, it explains quite a large part of what is going on. (Wade 1985, 484)

In the following section, I will discuss the validity of Wade's observations in relation to the study of undernutrition, starvation deaths and drought relief in West Bengal and Orissa states of India.

THE POLITICIAN-BUREAUCRAT NEXUS

An important function of the Indian bureaucracy has traditionally been to provide the political leadership with information on impending food crises and thereafter take action to combat the threat of famine. When the district bureaucracy, headed by the Collector (in some places called District Magistrate), is alert and provides timely and accurate information, food crises may be successfully combated. Further, democratic politics

and the role of public action is crucial in this connection as the political leadership may be pressurised to trigger the bureaucracy into action in order to prevent a major loss of lives (Dréze and Sen 1989; Banik 2007). Remote, tribal-dominated and drought-prone districts in the state are often referred to by IAS officers as ‘punishment postings’ or ‘thankless postings’. And although some officers who have served in such challenging districts recognise that they have an important role to play in developing the region, they are always aware that they may be transferred at any time. While some officers cope better than others, almost all have difficulties in remaining motivated in the face of recurrent crises. A group of officers were of the view that drought-prone and extremely poor districts attract three categories of officers: those who originally hail from nearby districts; officers who are disliked by the political leadership (either those who are seen to be loyal to a rival politician or party, or a person who is perceived to be incorruptible); and officers without ‘political clout’, i.e. officers who are politically not well connected and thus cannot influence their posting. Other officers similarly ‘victimised’ by the ruling party longed for a change of government, the rationale being that with new ministers at the helm, all those victimised by the previous regime would be suitably rewarded with prized postings in larger (more urban) districts or in the State Secretariat in the capital city. Interestingly, one young officer explicitly stated that he actually enjoyed working in such challenging districts since he felt he had something concrete to offer in terms of developing such ‘backward’ regions. However, in his case, allegations of corruption against him were even more numerous than was the case for many of his colleagues! A section of local journalists argued that it is precisely because ‘backward’ regions are so far away from the State capital that they easily become a haven for various groups of officials who wish to ‘mint money’. While some officers argued that ‘being cut-off’ from the ‘civilised world’ was a major problem, others felt that it could be a blessing in disguise as a civil servant could expedite his duties far removed from everyday administrative and political interference. As a senior official put it:

On the one hand, if one were determined enough, one could make substantial improvements in the long-term development of the district. On

the other, those with a corrupt bent of mind will also find solace ... One is free to be corrupt minus the accountability. It is almost as if the seniors [bureaucrats in the State Secretariat] operate with a certain 'tolerance level' with regard to remote areas. Certain minor irregularities are overlooked as long as someone is actually working in that godforsaken district.

Surprisingly, only a handful of the officers I interviewed had any qualms about being 'rewarded' with prized postings (in better-off and more urban districts) by politicians with whom they enjoyed a good relationship. And most officers did not seem to find anything wrong in making use of political and/or administrative contacts with the intention of influencing their postings. As one officer observed:

Everyone else does it. Don't you think it would be silly to be left behind? While we are all in the same boat, we are also in the same rat race. It is the only way to survive. We have to, at times, swallow our pride and take resort in the 'Yes, Sir', 'You are so right, Sir' and 'I will do as you ask, Sir' approach even though we may feel we are ten times better qualified than the average politician.

Officials also tended to remain silent and frequently changed the subject when asked about favouritism and what such politicians expected of them in return for such 'rewards'. There was never a direct mention about concrete benefits the officers would be able (and willing) to provide to their 'political patrons' although certain phrases that were frequently used provide some clues. These included: 'being accommodative', 'doing the needful', 'being responsive to grievances', 'caring for the masses', 'being flexible', 'being neutral and accessible to all', and 'responsive to political concerns'. In addition, they were keen on highlighting their own virtues and reputations of being 'efficient', 'honest' and 'hardworking' officers.

In a district in Orissa, I frequently heard stories of the 'unholy nexus' consisting of politicians, key civil servants posted to the district and businessmen/private contractors. On one particular occasion, I had an appointment with a major local political leader. When I reached his house, I was surprised to see a small and quite rundown structure, which

housed a large number of family members and party followers. The leader was not at home but soon telephoned an assistant and told him to escort me to a new destination for the interview so that 'we could have a proper discussion without being disturbed'. Upon reaching the new destination, in a fashionable area of town, I was ushered into a luxurious villa owned by a major businessman. The politician was sitting in the contractor's office (and in the contractor's chair) and gave every sign of being the person in charge. He acted as if he owned the property. Even the contractor gave the impression of being at the disposal of the politician. Subsequently, separate informants told me that this political leader had over the years actively seen to it that his contractor friend's firm was awarded some major government contracts for various infrastructural projects in the district. The noted journalist P. Sainath (1996, 317) had on numerous instances reported on how the poor in such underdeveloped regions recognise the intricate role of corruption in their lives and refer to development and drought relief as 'the third crop,' a crop the poor do not harvest.

THE CORRUPTION THEATRE

The case highlighted in Robert Wade's study (discussed earlier) is an example of 'systemic corruption' presupposes a general connivance by an entire, or close to the entire, agency concerned. I did not find clear-cut evidence to suggest that there was an elaborate system of sharing of revenue among a large number of officials in the districts of West Bengal and Orissa. People were, however, more than willing to openly speak of corruption and a substantial number of the allegations seemed to have a ring of truth about them – indeed they generally appeared to be credible as the allegers could point to certain concrete events, specific relationships and patterns of behaviour among selected officials. Some of these allegations were also corroborated by several independent sources. On a few occasions, I found some truth in allegations of the existence of a system of revenue sharing among a small group of officials numbering not more than 3–5, although one can never be sure of the exact numbers. Such a group would typically include one or more high-level officials (though usually not of the same rank) in charge of procurement and/or

distribution of resources and together with a selected few ‘Man Fridays’¹⁹ at lower levels of the system.

This does not, however, prevent an official from having similar ties with other groups simultaneously (depending on the official’s seniority) but the point here is that there is very little evidence to point to a systematic sharing of revenue involving entire government departments. For instance, a top official may demand a ‘commission’ for a favourable decision (e.g. related to the selection of beneficiaries for an anti-poverty programme, geographical focus of a drought relief effort; approval of government contracts, loans and even pensions) or demand a ‘certain percentage’ of revenue acquired by the illegal use of government assets for private gain (e.g. the leasing out of government vehicles to friends or contacts who run a transport business). Such commissions or transactions need not be of a monetary nature – they can sometimes be ‘saved’ for collection at a later date (perhaps after the official has been transferred elsewhere out of the district) or the official may simply use it to ‘return a favour’ someone else had done for him in connection with a separate dealing. All this is practiced with the utmost of caution and although each involved part knows something about the set-up, no one has enough information to be able to bring down, malign or involve the top official(s) or ringleaders in the event of a scandal.

Local journalists play a crucial role in this context. District-based journalists are seldom paid a fixed salary; rather their earning is dependent on a certain percentage (often around 15 per cent) of the advertisement (government and private) revenue they are able to generate for their newspapers. As such, most of them rely on other sources of income (e.g. an additional job or a private business) in order to make ends meet. It appeared therefore somewhat strange that they are willing to work with little assured remuneration. It soon became quite apparent to me that being in possession of a ‘press card’ was immensely valuable to an individual in the district. The press card opened many doors and provided journalists with access to important officials and politicians. A clever journalist could easily manipulate various situations to supplement his regular income. For instance, there were indications that a group of local journalists were ‘loyal’ to a high-ranking local bureaucrat. Despite

several irregularities committed by this official, these journalists, who appeared to function collectively, avoided the publication of negative reports against him. In contrast, they could sometimes be persuaded to publish an adverse report against powerholders who belonged to a rival camp. Some of my informants were very confident of the fact that a senior journalist of the area (the ringleader of the group of journalists) had, on several instances, blackmailed key officials in the district administration. All this seemed to reinforce the impression of journalists being key players or allies for an official interested in supplementing his official source of income.

An interesting feature I observed was that officials with competing authority did not appear to collaborate with each other in a corrupt transaction. They were careful not to share such information with the other (and his/her 'cronies') lest it be used against them by way of complaints (in the form of petitions and reports) to higher-ups in the State capital. It was particularly interesting to note how every new official posted to the district immediately tried to assess the situation in terms of 'who belongs to which camp'. They were also careful in identifying and picking a few 'Man Fridays' from their department who could be trusted to carry out a range of 'minor' and/or 'unpleasant tasks', including the collection of bribes and/or functioning as an 'approach person' or a contact (one who can speak unofficially on behalf of the official). It was also preferable if 'a little something can be put aside' in a deal, which was not directly connected with the office-holder's position. Thus, for instance, the police chief could choose (and feel it safe enough) to use his power, prestige and influence to receive a kickback in an area such as the construction of a tennis court on behalf of the Sports Association of which he was President. He could thereby give the impression that he was seriously interested in developing the sports facilities in the area while at the same time not minding a certain private benefit accruing out of his involvement. As one local trader put it, 'After all, he is doing it in his own free time and it does not hurt the government if a private contractor gives him a little something for being allowed to bag the contract'. Such statements appeared to legitimise corruption as long as there was a clear-cut public-private divide.

The government, it appeared, did not mind such cases as ‘it has much more serious things to take care of’. However, in reality, such distinctions of ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres are usually ‘blurred’, and as Gupta (1995) has argued, an official in India usually enjoys the same prestige and power at home, as she/he does in the office. This was particularly a problem due to the ‘24-hour nature of the job’ that many officials termed their work while serving in the districts. They further claimed that this required active use of a residential office. Thus there is often a thin line separating private business from the official – between entertaining visitors and guests in the residential office in late evening and conducting official business at the same office at odd hours. And as it turned out, private and official business was often conducted simultaneously. For example, I was often a visitor in official residences where innumerable friends, colleagues, Man Fridays, traders, journalists and politicians or relatives of politicians, dropped by. Sometimes these were merely ‘courtesy calls’ lasting only a few minutes, while at other times they stayed on for dinner and a drink in the official’s residential quarters adjacent to the office. Elsewhere, in a remote district in West Bengal, I did notice an exception to such practices. The District Judge lamented on how boring his evenings and weekends were resulting out of a ‘lack of social interaction with the locals’. It was of the utmost importance, he felt, ‘to maintain no local ties whatsoever’ as the slightest form of socialising with the local population could attract allegations of corruption and thereby ‘compromise his neutrality’. As a result, he ‘spent every evening reading or watching television with his wife’. This does not mean by any means that all judges practice such rigid social codes. There is indeed no evidence for generalisation but it appears that individuals can set their own limits when it comes to tackling the ‘blurred boundaries’ between official duties and leisure activities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There seems to be relatively clear-cut evidence that corruption in large doses is damaging to a country’s attempt at improving the conditions of life for its citizens. Studying corruption is a challenging task. It has many

forms, which makes it difficult to ascertain the intricate details and the real extent or impact of the phenomenon on issues of economic development. Corruption is generally regarded and perceived as being illegal. With this notion of illegality is the notion of secrecy, implying that 'it is mutually beneficial for corrupt officials to follow the strategy of protecting each other' and that 'if corruption is pervasive, auditing an official will be very costly' as other corrupt officials 'have the incentive to destroy evidence or mislead auditors on behalf of the one being investigated' (Lui 1996, 27–28). In contrast, 'if corruption is rare, a corrupt official will get less protection from his colleagues, who then are more likely to be honest' (*ibid.*). Rose-Ackerman (1978) suggests that bureaucrats should be given competing or overlapping jurisdictions and that this may help reduce corruption since the potential briber has to persuade many (or all) of the officers involved. When a client is unhappy with the service provided by one officer, he/she can approach another with similar powers and areas of competence/responsibility. In many developing countries, one often hears of 'collusion' between bureaucrats and politicians and it is such collusion that needs to be made difficult to achieve (Bardhan 1997).

Corruption, in most developing countries, becomes a highly popular issue particularly before any election and the public is under the impression that it is actually increasing by the day. I believe that in many poor countries, the discourse on corruption can often be perceived as a safety valve for overall frustration with government efforts or as an expression of a feeling of despondency. It is also the first thing that comes to most people's minds while attempting to explain the failure of public policy. However, it is simplistic to accord corruption the main blame for all of the problems facing developing countries. Although it is usually a factor in some way or another, the corruption approach may not always offer the best explanation as to 'why things do not work out as they should'. Indeed, and as Johnston (2000, 13) aptly puts it, 'While it is fashionable to refer to corruption in the language and symbolism of a fatal disease – one that will bring about collapse if it is not eradicated – in reality it can be very long-lived indeed, sustained both by underlying structural causes and powerful beneficiaries'. And despite the numerous negative

impacts of corruption as discussed above, it is essential to recognize that ‘significant corruption is a *symptom* of deeper problems and imbalances’ and that ‘eradicating specific corrupt practices – while certainly a task worth pursuing – may by itself be insufficient’ (ibid.).

Together with bribery, favouritism and nepotism continue to form an integral part of the definition of corruption in large parts of the developing world. In recent years, and particularly due to the efforts of the vigilance commissions and anti-corruption agencies, the number of cases filed in the courts against corrupt individuals has been on the increase. This has been somewhat helped by the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) – the first binding global agreement on corruption that entered into force in December 2005.²⁰ The UNCAC emphasises preventive action (e.g. in the judiciary, procurement agencies and anti-corruption bodies), the criminalisation of the most prevalent form of corrupt transactions in both private and public sectors (e.g. trading in influence, concealment and laundering of the gains from corruption, addition to bribery and embezzlement) and international cooperation (e.g. in relation to prevention, investigation and prosecution of offenders). The UNCAC thus introduces an exhaustive list of rules in addition to standards and measures aimed at strengthening the legal and regulatory anti-corruption policies in countries signatory to the document. Despite failing to incorporate a robust monitoring mechanism, one area where the UNCAC has already begun to have an impact is in asset recovery, particularly the retrieval of assets derived from grand corruption and often involving former heads of state. Thus the former President of Zambia, Frederick Chiluba was found guilty by a UK court in 2007 for stealing GBP 23 million of Zambian public money. The civil suit was filed on behalf of the Zambian attorney general and in cooperation with the UK authorities. And the presiding judge stated, ‘The money recovered can now be returned to the government of Zambia to be invested in the people’s future – such as education or clean drinking water for some of the seven million Zambians living in poverty.’²¹

While such cases involving several governments and well-known political leaders are few and far between, getting a quick judicial decision on much smaller cases at national and local levels has proven difficult.

And in many instances, corrupt individuals continue to wield enormous power and influence even while their cases are pending in the courts. They may also be in a position to destroy evidence against them. This has been most clearly borne out in recent cases in Mexico, Uganda, Malawi, Bangladesh and India. There has also been a spurt of investigative reports in the media documenting corruption at the highest levels of political and administrative power. A further encouraging aspect has been the innovative steps taken by bureaucrats themselves to identify the most corrupt among them and initiative judicial probes of corrupt behaviour. In Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state, young IAS officers have started holding regular meetings of the IAS Officers' Association where secret ballot votes list the three most corrupt IAS officers in the state. The difficulty with all such measures, nonetheless, lies in the lack of a credible deterrent against corruption. Even when such lists have been submitted to political and judicial authorities, few corrupt officers have been dismissed from service. Politicians, even when charge-sheeted, are seldom made to suffer strict penalties. In many cases, charges are usually dismissed or not taken seriously. Having political backing (either from a group of powerful politicians or a political party) has, therefore, become an important armoury in the arsenal of a bureaucrat's daily routine. There is a perceived need among sections of the bureaucracy in virtually all developing countries that it is better to cultivate political patrons who can influence a future course of events even when there is no need for doing so in the short term. The blame for the politicisation of the civil services cannot, therefore, be placed solely on politicians. The much-cited 'unholy nexus' between politicians and bureaucrats has now become a matter of routine – it is a fact of life that most citizens in poor countries take for granted.

The interesting question is whether the masses, educated and uneducated alike, truly believe that corruption can be reduced. Corrupt behaviour is usually one that is condemned and censured. Here lies the important question of who condemns corruption. It may be easier for some individuals and groups to condemn the phenomenon than others. The sad reality is that while many citizens in the developing world speak vehemently against corruption, they realise that without the offer

or demand of a bribe very few of their needs and demands will be accomplished. When one's income, business or professional career depends on powerholders who are corrupt, it may well be odd to expect a person to campaign actively against the system. It is also the case that individuals may not consider certain acts as being corrupt. Rather, it may be considered a part of everyday life and not worth making a fuss. Praver Jhabvala (1956, 56)²² writes about one such case involving an Indian businessman from New Delhi:

Bribery and corruption! These were foreign words, it seemed to him, and the ideas behind them were also foreign. Here in India, he thought, one did not know such words. Giving presents and gratuities to government officers was an indispensable courtesy and a respectable, civilized way of carrying on business.

Similarly, the practice of *guanxi* in China is a social custom and entails gift-giving in all areas of life, including in family relationships and in interactions with politicians, social institutions and business relations (Steidlmeier 1999). And not just foreigners, but also locals may not necessarily reflect on a daily basis over the ethics of gift-giving and when such practices cross over into the sphere of corruption. The discussion so far therefore aptly highlights the difficulties in arriving at a universally accepted definition of corruption. Can we concretely measure whether there exists a genuine attempt in society to reduce corruption? If so, who is taking the initiative and what are the chances for its success? Is it merely the paying of lip service before elections or can a common platform to combat the menace be established?

I support the contention that the focus, therefore, must shift on to the causes, the reasons behind corrupt acts (Leff 1964). Most politicians already possess an enormous amount of personal wealth. When do they stop accumulating it? If it is the enormous cost of running for election, then a serious attempt must be made to regulate campaign financing. Is corruption among powerholders propelled by a fear that income will subside once out of power, and hence, 'let's make hay while the sun shines'? Corruption perhaps increases when there is an unstable govern-

ment, with elected representatives serving brief tenures? There may be a mad rush to make money quickly since re-election is not guaranteed. Bureaucrats, on the other hand, may feel left out. Power is simply not enough. Power, with the absence or lack of discretionary functions (coupled with an uncertainty over future career, postings and promotions), may provide a substantial incentive to accumulate wealth through corrupt acts while in office. A few quotes from the India study illustrate this point: 'After all, everyone else is doing it ... why should I be left behind' or 'It is safer being corrupt than being honest ... Your colleagues trust you ... they know you won't blow the whistle on them'.

There is considerable talk of how important it is to combat corruption and how it is the most serious of problems in the development process – and corruption is therefore the usual suspect when economic growth and development programmes fail to deliver the benefits to the large majority of the population. However, and as I have tried to show in this essay, the key point is that corruption has deep-seated roots in complex social settings and any attempt to check its growth must be related to attempts at improving the participation of individuals in decision-making as well as in voicing concern over impacts of policy implementation. In this regard, I agree with Johnston (2000, 13) in that 'Reform will not be a one-size-fits-all proposition, or a matter of unpacking a "tool kit"; what works in one setting may be irrelevant or harmful in another. We need to understand corruption in its broader context'. And together with incentives for honest officials and sustained political education for the masses, as witnessed in Singapore and Hong Kong, are perhaps the most effective ways in changing the status quo. Accordingly, it may be a far better proposition if emphasis was given to identifying the victims of corruption and their losses, which in turn would lead to an identification of the winners (*ibid.*, 22–26; Alam 1995).

Many empirical studies of corruption are criticised for being too impressionistic in content. It may well be the case that this essay too is impressionistic to a certain extent. A major challenge has been to filter away charges of corruption levied by one group on another. In my studies, I have tried to employ two major filters in order to flush out 'biased' views: charges of corruption based on political rivalry and charges of corrup-

tion against an organisation or a particular individual; and allegations of corruption based on frustration at there not being any concrete results flowing from administrative decisions. These filters, I must admit, have not always been easy to deploy. Most academic work on corruption relies on an indirect approach, with observation techniques and first-hand interviews being put together in order to construct a picture, as accurate as possible, of reality. There is, hence, a risk that conclusions drawn in any such study may not be generalised to apply to other situations. Each case, each act and each corrupt individual may differ from another.

THE SAVIOUR

The relationship between democracy and development has attracted renewed interest in recent times. While large numbers of people continue to suffer the pains of poverty, an increasing number of countries in the developing world are choosing democratic forms of government. And Western donors, for their part, continue to highlight the key role that elections play in the democratisation process, often making aid conditional upon the holding of free and fair elections and improvement in the respect of civil and political rights. They also readily criticise the recent trend by many Asian donors (e.g. China, Taiwan and South Korea) to provide generous grants and loans to African and East Asian countries without tying up such development assistance to good governance and the promotion of human rights. The impression given is that democracy, or at least its introduction, will save poor countries from falling further into the trap of poverty. Democracy, apart from being intrinsically valuable, is therefore largely viewed by many Western donors to further promote an important instrumental goal, namely development. Thus it is necessary to question whether certain regimes are better able and equipped to promote economic growth and eradicate poverty than others. In other words, what characterizes the relationship between democracy and development? Is there a connection between 'pro-poorness' and 'democracy'? The topic is also interesting given the increased use of the concept of 'good governance', 'pro-poor governance' and 'democratic governance' by donors and multilateral institutions when they impart advice to developing countries.

It will suffice to note at this stage that most cross-country studies focusing on the relationship between democracy on the one hand and economic growth or poverty reduction on the other face enormous methodological problems and challenges.¹ For example, there are many types of authoritarianism, and countries that fall under this category are very heterogeneous in character. Moreover, classifying democracy itself is also difficult since it usually takes various forms and it is difficult to identify countries that have been democracies for a substantially long period (which allows for meaningful comparisons). Finally, all countries – including democracies – choose various types of economic strategies in order to promote economic growth and development and hence it is very difficult to operate with a constant economic strategy variable.

Despite the above challenges, numerous studies have empirically examined the relationship between democracy and economic growth. Interestingly, however, the literature is inconclusive. For instance, while Sirowy and Inkeles (1991) find a negative relationship between democracy and development, Campos (1994)² finds a positive relationship. In contrast, Przeworski and Limongi (1993) do not find any evidence on whether democracy fosters or hinders economic growth. Based on an exhaustive review of theoretical arguments and statistical studies, they provide the best answer currently available when they conclude: ‘we do not know whether democracy fosters or hinders economic growth’ (ibid., 64).³ Several studies focusing on the relationship between democracy and poverty reduction (Varshney 1999; Moore and Putzel 1999) also conclude that there is no consistent connection between pro-poorness and democracy. These studies show that the democratic performance of countries like India, Costa Rica, Botswana, and Jamaica in reducing poverty does not compare favourably with non-democratic experiments in South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, where the percentage of population below the poverty line is almost zero. In fact, the highest economic growers have almost always been authoritarian, although it is important to keep in mind that the East Asian success story may be exceptional since several authoritarian regimes – especially in Latin America (e.g. Chile, Peru, Argentina) and Africa (e.g. Zaire, Niger, Senegal) – have been particularly insensitive to the poor. Thus most studies conclude that in

terms of poverty reduction, democracies are not the best nor the worst performers. Indeed, the wild authoritarian fluctuations contrast sharply with a certain middling democratic consistency. But how can we explain such trends and what is the value of democracy?

I begin the essay by examining the relationship between democracy and various types of freedoms with a particular focus on socio-economic rights and freedoms. Thereafter I will discuss the relationship between democracy and development before providing a brief overview of historical trends in the relationship between democracy and development. This is followed by a discussion on some of the main arguments against and for democracy in relation to development. I end the essay by reflecting on a selected number of challenges – including the role of elections, choice of economic strategy and the role of politicians as saviours – that democracies in the developing world face in promoting development and reducing poverty. The overall purpose is to examine whether and to what extent democracy can save countries from falling into the trap of poverty and underdevelopment.

DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM

There is currently a general consensus on an intimate relationship between democracy and freedom and several definitions of democracy, except narrow minimalist versions, explicitly contain references to various individual freedoms. It is also largely assumed that democracy possesses the capacity to foster basic human freedoms, i.e. certain minimum freedoms relating to those of assembly, speech, expression and opposition are essential in order for elections to be meaningful. The argument is that checks and balances inherent in democratic systems prevent excessive abuse of power and arbitrary oppression while guaranteeing rights and entitlements to citizens. Hence, the association between democratic governance and its ability to promote human rights and freedoms provides strong justification of the general preference of democracy over other forms of government (Bova 1997, 112). However, the democracy-freedom association is not as simple as it is often taken to be. It is imperative that democracy and freedom are seen, at the outset, as distinct concepts.

Using a minimalist view, ‘democracy’ primarily involves ‘the selection of rulers or policies’ while ‘freedom’ relates to the ability to ‘engage in certain behaviors or to hold and express views without governmental interference’ (ibid., 113). The point I wish to make here is that freedom can exist without democracy, but not vice versa.

In the substantial literature on ‘freedom’ and ‘liberty’ (I shall use the terms interchangeably), it is difficult to identify a core meaning of the term that can then be conceptualised or variously interpreted. This difficulty is put in context by Isaiah Berlin, who observes, ‘... almost every moralist in human history has praised freedom. Like happiness and goodness, like nature and reality, the meaning of this term is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist’ (Berlin 1969, 121). Indeed, there is a general tendency to use ‘freedom’, with its synonym ‘liberty’, to designate whatever actions, institutions, policies, or political system one happens to value most – from obedience and law to economic well-being. Over centuries a number of features have been identified with the term: lack of coercion, the presence of opportunities, the ability to do what one wants, self-determination, rational action and self-realisation. It is not obvious, however, that one could plausibly argue that all are conceptualisations, albeit in various ways, of some self-same concept (or core meaning) of freedom. On the contrary, they can be seen to constitute more than one, and perhaps several, concepts of freedom (Brenkert 1991, 5). Indeed, various conceptions of freedom emphasise different aspects of human activity. For instance, Adler (1961) identifies ‘five subjects of controversy’ pertaining to freedom: the circumstantial freedom of self-realisation, an acquired freedom of self-perfection, a natural freedom of self-determination, collective freedom, and political freedom. Thus, while there is an overwhelming agreement on the inherent value of freedom, there is disagreement on how precise the concept should be and which part of human activity it ought to symbolise. This dilemma is important to keep in mind as it ‘explains how it is possible for the most violently opposed political parties to pay homage to the “same” ideal’ (Crocker 1980, 1).

Like freedom, defining democracy is immensely challenging given the large number of meanings that are traditionally associated with the term.

Minimalist conceptions of democracy, termed ‘electoral democracy’ by Larry Diamond (1996, 21), highlight the importance of ‘minimal levels of freedom in order for competition and participation to be meaningful’. Schumpeter (1947, 269) is credited with providing the classic minimalist definition of democracy as a system ‘for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’. At the other end of the spectrum lies the broad concept of liberal democracy which includes periodic, free and fair electoral contestation together with universal adult suffrage. This category includes a wide range of features: power resides with elected officials and their appointees (not unaccountable actors like the military); existence of a system of checks and balances whereby executive power is accountable to institutions like an independent judiciary, parliament, etc.; all groups (including cultural, ethnic, religious) included in constitutional provisions can form parties, contest elections and freely express their views and preserve their culture; citizens have access to alternative and multiple channels to express and represent their views (e.g. independent media); citizens can enjoy freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration, etc.; citizens are politically equal under the rule of law, which provides safeguards against terror, exile or unjustified detention (Diamond 1996, 23–24).

Between the terms ‘minimalist’ and ‘liberal’ democracies, there are several intermediary conceptions of democracy which ‘explicitly incorporate basic civil freedoms of expression and association, yet still allow for considerable restriction of citizenship rights’ (ibid., 25). These intermediary views are distinct depending on ‘whether political and civil freedoms are seen as relevant mainly to the extent that they ensure meaningful *electoral* competition and participation, or are instead viewed as necessary to ensure a wider range of democratic functions’ (ibid.).⁴

INCLUDING SUBSTANTIAL FREEDOMS IN A DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY

The debate on whether substantial freedoms should be included in a definition of democracy has been largely influenced by Robert Dahl’s well-known notion of polyarchy that builds on Schumpeter’s minimalist

definition and highlights a set of conditions required for a democracy. These conditions include: the freedom to establish and participate in organisations; freedom of expression; the right to vote in elections; the right to stand for elective office; the ability of political leaders to compete for votes/political support; alternative sources of information; and free and fair elections. Dahl assumes that by fulfilling these conditions a country has a good chance of being a polyarchy (Dahl 1971, 3; 1992, 235). For Dahl, however, 'a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens' (1971, 1). Hence it follows that the above-mentioned conditions that Dahl specifies for a polyarchy are necessary for a responsive and accountable government. In a similar vein, Amartya Sen (2000, 10) sees democracy as a 'demanding system', and argues that it is important not to merely equate the complex demands of democracy only with the 'mechanical' conditions of majority rule. In addition to the right to vote, periodic elections and the respect for election results, democracy 'also requires the protection of liberties and freedoms, respect for legal entitlements, and the guaranteeing of free discussion and uncensored distribution of news and fair comment' (ibid.). Przeworski et al. (2000, 33–34) disagree with the above view and argue that notions like 'accountability', 'responsiveness', 'responsibility' and 'participation' should not be seen as definitional aspects of democracy. The view is that such notions are 'muddled' and, for example what Dahl posits as conditions for 'responsiveness' actually constitute a theorem and not a definition of democracy. They write, 'the question whether or not regimes characterized by freedom of opinion, widespread participation, and repeated elections are in fact responsive is best left open for investigation, rather than resolved by definition' (Przeworski et al. 2000, 33–34). And Przeworski (1991, 10) argues in favour of re-establishing a minimalist definition of democracy by starting with the simple assertion that democracy is 'a system in which parties lose elections'. Once this is recognised, democracy can be narrowly defined as 'a regime in which those who govern are selected through contested elections' (Przeworski et al. 2000, 15). It follows then that there are two central aspects of democracy: 'government' and 'contestation'. First, the office of the chief executive and the seats of the effective legislative body

should be filled directly or indirectly. Second, the filling of these seats should take place through a process of contested elections⁵ which ‘grant their occupants the authority to exercise governance free of the legal constraint of having to respond to a power not constituted as a result of the electoral process’ (ibid.).⁶

Other approaches argue that it is best to focus on certain indices or basic principles of democratisation. For example, one approach would be to study countries termed to be democracies and arrive at a definition based on specific experiences and features of these societies (Lijphart 1984). However, a much needed conceptual clarity of ‘democracy’ has proved elusive given the great variety of forms that democracy takes. This is borne out from the innumerable empirical and theoretical contributions that have identified hundreds of sub-types of democracy, which has led to added confusion rather than clarity (Diamond 1996, 21). The problem is partly that democracy is an ideal that is pursued by people and countries all over the world. Given the heterogeneity of peoples and countries, it is only fair to expect that there will be innumerable understandings and practices of democratic principles. Hence, in many contexts, it may be inappropriate to infer the characteristics of any one political society and generalise it to apply to other very different ones (Saward 1994). Etymological definitions can be useful but a phrase like ‘rule by the people’ is usually ambiguous (Held 1987; Hadenius 1992).⁷ Beetham (1999), however, suggests a very useful way of tackling the issue and recommends distinguishing the *concept* of democracy from different *theories* of democracy. Starting with the idea that there is a ‘basic core to the meaning of democracy’, he argues that the ‘question of the definition of democracy’ ought not to be confused with ‘the separate question of whether it is a good, or how much of it is a good’ (ibid., 2).

Thus, while the concept of democracy is uncontested, the theories of democracy may be contested on matters such as ‘how much democracy is desirable or practicable, and how it might be realized in a sustainable institutional form’ (ibid., 33). Beetham (1993, 6–7; 1999, 33) goes on to define democracy as ‘rule of the people’, and identifies two basic principles – ‘popular control’ and ‘political equality’. Democracy is thereby the ‘mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules

and policies over which the people exercise control'. Further, the 'most democratic arrangement' is one 'in which all members of the collectivity enjoy effective equal rights to take part in such decision-making directly – one, that is to say, which realizes to the greatest conceivable degree the principles of popular control and equality in its exercise' (Beetham 1999, 33). Similarly, Hadenius (1992, 9) argues the case of 'political democracy' where public policy is 'governed by the freely expressed will of the people whereby all individuals are to be treated as equals'. The notion that people are to rule on their own thus involves the principle of 'popular sovereignty' and 'autonomy'. Others wish to identify other core features of democracy involving both the norms of citizenship and a notion of political sovereignty (Lively 1975; Holden 1988).⁸

OPERATIONALISING DEMOCRACY

The above discussion illustrates three difficulties with operationalising democracy. First, what features of democracy should be included in its definition? Second, whether minimalist definitions are more appropriate as opposed to wider definitions that include extensive liberties. In other words, it may be useful to start with a minimalist definition highlighting some core values and then proceed on to add to the list of definitional features based on empirical evidence. Third, and related to the first point, should democracy guarantee a basket of liberties for the enjoyment of citizens and how inclusive (or extensive) should this basket of liberties be? There is, unfortunately, no straightforward answer to the above questions. In fact, the issue at hand should not be seen as requiring a universal solution. The only sensible thing to say is that what one considers to include in a definition of democracy, and how extensive the basket of liberties ought to be in a democracy, will depend largely on the context of a study. The quest to develop a general theory of democracy may well result in very different definitions of democracy as opposed to studies that wish to empirically investigate some relationship between democracy and a particular phenomenon. For instance, when Przeworski et al. (2000) want to study the impact of democracy on economic development, it makes more sense for them to take a starting point in a minimalist definition. They wish to 'examine empirically, rather than

decide by definition, whether or not the repeated holding of contested elections is associated with economic performance' and view democracy as primarily 'a regime in which some governmental offices are filled by contested elections' (ibid., 35).

Hence, the nature of a study and what one wishes to contrast democracy with often determines what one decides to include in the definition of democracy. It is perfectly in order to start with a definition of democracy as consisting of a basket of core (limited) features like contestation, government and freedoms of speech and association. However, this does not place great emphasis on freedoms as such, but rather on the *electoral* aspect of democracy. At the same time, a concept of *liberal democracy* places far greater emphasis on a wide ranging list of liberties, the notions of 'freedom' and 'democracy' are seen to be identical. Thus the threshold for calling a society democratic may well be too high and such an approach may also overlook the fact that it may still be worthwhile to recognise the difference between minimalist electoral democracies and non-democracies like authoritarian or 'sultanistic' forms of rule. For instance, Bova (1997, 113–114) argues that electoral democracies do after all 'produce regular and peaceful transfers of political power that differentiate them from authoritarian regimes' and this needs to be accepted and highlighted.

While freedom can exist without democracy, most democracies today allow for the enjoyment of at least a basic (often minimum) basket of freedoms. Once this is established, it needs to be further acknowledged that freedoms, of various kinds, are present in all societies in varying degrees, not just in democracies. There is a difference between the presence of a democratic political system based on majority rule and the enjoyment of freedom.

Freedoms are not necessarily absent, non-functioning or limited merely due to an absence of free and fair voting mechanisms. For instance, Great Britain, according to most definitions, could not be categorised as a democracy until the 1832 Reform Act, following which franchise was granted to most adult males. However, there did exist in British society considerable and fundamental freedoms before 1832 in the form of free speech, an independent judiciary with trial by jury, separation of

powers between various branches of government, limited government, etc. (Sowell 1997, 52). Hence, the argument so far is that individuals and groups (often organised into parties and/or civic associations) residing in non-democracies may nonetheless enjoy freedom, albeit of a different kind from those enjoyed in democracies.

Now, the extent of enjoyment of various freedoms may vary from country to country. Even among democracies, it is more likely that liberal democracies will allow greater freedoms to its citizens than countries that are categorised as being democratic using minimalist criteria. It is, nonetheless, vital to reemphasise the argument that *freedom can exist without democracy but not vice versa*. Some basic liberties provide a sound base for a process of democratisation which may subsequently be followed by an expansion of individual rights and liberties. Accordingly, two crucial sets of issues need to be acknowledged in this context.

First, certain basic civil and political freedoms are a necessary *precondition* for meaningful contestation and participation in a democratic process. Second, substantial individual and societal freedoms – and the degree of enjoyment of initially granted civil and political freedoms – may result as democracy is consolidated, i.e. the idea that democratic governments are better than non-democracies at respecting, protecting and promoting human rights and freedoms.

Let us now explore the first issue relating to the institutionalisation of certain basic civil and political rights and freedoms that provide the preconditions for electoral democracy.⁹ The Norwegian political scientist Stein Rokkan (1968), in a seminal work, provided a most useful way of examining the origin and expansion of democratic norms and practices in the structuring of mass politics in the smaller European democracies. In the process of democratisation, four ‘locks’ or ‘institutional thresholds’ need to be surmounted successfully and in sequence in order to increase the likelihood for the achievement of a stable democracy. The first threshold, that of *legitimation*, relates to the right to petition, criticism and demonstration against the regime and the rights (and limits) of assembly, expression and publication (Rokkan et al. 1970, 79). The second threshold, *incorporation*, concerns the rights of participation in the choice of representation for new groups and the crucial question is spe-

cifically how long it takes ‘potential supporters of rising movements of opposition [before they are given] formal rights of participation’ (ibid.). The threshold of *representation* is the third lock and pertains to the access of representatives of new groups to legislative institutions. The final threshold of *executive power*, involves the extent of access that representatives of new groups have to the instruments of governance (ibid.).¹⁰ In a similar manner, Robert Dahl (1992) argues that certain democratic rights and liberties are likely to be institutionalised before others and posits a ‘plausible sequence’. Accordingly, ‘the earliest political right to develop is likely to be the right to *alternative sources of information*, independent of government control: samizdat, journals of dissent and opposition, an opposition press, and so on’ (ibid., 246). Upon completion of this phase, society may allow a general freedom of expression, protected by courts and other institutions and ‘governments and oppositions may even become habituated to the notion that so long as people do not actually *organize* into parties or other explicitly political organisations, they may express themselves almost without limit’ (ibid., 246). A most important step is reached when activists can *openly organise themselves* in informal organisations and political parties with the aim of participating and winning the elections. The final step is that of *free and fair elections*, accompanied by a full range of democratic institutions. To Dahl, free and fair elections are the culmination of a process, not its beginning. This is a very pertinent observation as the confusion between the terms ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ often leads many to argue for the immediate holding of free and fair elections in countries that simply do not have the right preconditions for this event. Hence, when certain preconditions do not exist, democracy may not have the sound foundation that it needs and its sustenance may prove to be difficult.

The second issue identified above relates to the ability of democracies, in comparison to non-democracies, to further the enjoyment of initially granted freedoms into more substantial ones. In consolidated and subsequently stable democracies with a well-developed political culture, ‘the range of rights and liberties available to citizens ... goes well beyond what is strictly required for the existence of democracy itself’ (Dahl 1992, 236). While this may often be the case, democracy and freedom do not

enjoy a directly proportional relationship and maximising both is a challenge for many societies. As Przeworski et al. (2000, 34) aptly argue, ‘Whereas democracy is a system of political rights – these are definitional – it is not a system that necessarily furnishes the conditions for effective exercise of these rights’. In this context it is useful to distinguish between negative and positive rights and freedoms following the influential contribution to the discourse of freedom by Sir Isaiah Berlin.

The *negative view* looks at freedom to be the absence of interference by other human beings on individual actions. This is a manner in which freedom has been mainly understood in the Anglo-American ‘liberal’ tradition, with proponents ranging from Thomas Hobbes and J. S. Mill to contemporary philosophers like John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Negative freedom entails the independence an individual has from interference in his/her activity not just by other persons but also by institutions or government.¹¹ Thus freedom, in this view is ‘simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others’ (Berlin 1969, 122). Further, it ‘is not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy ... Freedom in this sense is not, at any rate logically, connected with democracy or self-government’ (ibid., 129–30). If this observation is strictly interpreted, negative freedom is not primarily political since it does not require any particular political system or a specific type of society. The strengths of this negative or ‘freedom from’ view can be identified with its concern for the protection of individuals from the forces of government and society. Liberal or negative freedom aims to seek out those forces that constrain individuals and in doing so it describes society as one in which other people, and social and political institutions, pose constant sources of threat.

The *positive view* of freedom, argued forcefully in a tradition ranging from Rousseau to Marx and Marcuse, sees freedom in terms of the presence of various possibilities and opportunities that enable an individual capable to do or be something.¹² Positive freedom is the ‘freedom which consists in being one’s own master’ or of being an ‘instrument of my own, not of other men’s, acts of will’ (Berlin 1969, 131). Berlin believes that this conception of positive freedom is synonymous with knowing what is rationally or ideally necessary or best to do. This idea is then connected with that of a rational ‘higher self’, which has the task of controlling and

disciplining the lower or irrational self or the ‘passions’. This higher or ‘real’ self is then associated with ‘something wider than the individual ... as a “social whole” of which the individual is an element or aspect’. This entity is then identified as being the ‘true’ self which, by imposing its collective, or ‘organic’, single will upon its recalcitrant ‘members’, achieves its own, and therefore their ‘higher’ freedom (ibid., 132).

DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

While the negative-positive distinction of freedom has come in for substantial critical analyses,¹³ it is particularly relevant in terms of the actual exercise and purpose of civil and political rights and freedoms, especially with regard to issues of development and basic human rights. Amartya Sen has argued that by providing incentives and information, political rights contribute towards the solution of economic deprivation (Sen 1999; Sen 2000). He emphasizes the importance of the ‘force of economic needs’ on the one hand while recognising the ‘salience of political rights’ on the other (Sen 1994, 32). Building on the concepts of ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ freedom, the core of Sen’s argument is that the relationship between political rights and economic needs is an important instrumental one; namely, by providing incentives and information, political rights contribute towards the solution of economic deprivation. He writes:

When we move from the direct importance of political freedom to its instrumental role, we have to consider the political incentives that operate on governments and on the persons and groups that are in office. The rulers have the incentive to listen to what people want if they have to face their criticism and seek their support in elections. (Sen 2000, 152)

Democratic political rights also play a constitutive role since the understanding of economic need in a society depends on ‘open public debates and discussions, and the guaranteeing of those debates and those discussions require an insistence on political rights’ (Sen 1994, 32). Thus political rights in democracies are important not only for the fulfilment of needs, they are crucial also for the formulation of needs. The case of

the right to food is illustrative in this context. Food constitutes both a basic right and a basic need for all individuals. Without food the right to life for humans loses its meaning as human living is dependent on the ability to access and consume food on a daily basis. In this sense, the right to food can be said to form the basis of all society and be constitutive of the most fundamental of all human rights, the right to life. Unless the right to food is first fulfilled, the protection of other human rights becomes a mockery for those who must spend all their energy merely to maintain life itself.¹⁴ Negative freedom, advocating absence of interference from others, may be of little value if positive freedoms are not guaranteed such that individuals can make use of their personal capacities and resources to gain a right to food. In this connection, Sen argues, 'If a person is not free from hunger and lacks the means and the practical opportunities to feed himself or herself adequately, then that person's positive freedom must be seen as having been thoroughly compromised' (Sen 1987a, 3). This can take place while 'his or her negative freedom may be completed unviolated, if this failure to acquire enough food is not a result of his or her having been stopped by interference from others' (ibid.). Thus, Sen concludes that the freedom to live long – 'particularly valued since our ability to do other things is, obviously, conditional on our being here' – is an important positive freedom. Further, the achievement of longevity and the measurement of life expectancy are important indicators of a 'foundational positive freedom' (ibid., 9). Once the freedom to live long is established, one is better able to recognise several other important positive freedoms like freedom from hunger and undernutrition, freedom from escapable morbidity, freedom from illiteracy, etc.

Sen is obviously correct in highlighting the importance of free public deliberation in a democracy, which provides a better foundation for combating economic need. However, he assumes that democratic institutions by themselves will guarantee public deliberation and an effective response against poverty and deprivation. In contrast, I argue that this is not necessarily the case, particularly in many developing societies where democracy remains an 'unfinished project'. This applies even to the world's largest democracy, India. In such societies, civil and politi-

cal rights do not necessarily promote economic and social rights and freedoms. Thus instead of merely being concerned with the ideal role of democracy, it is important to address a second-order question which relates to the nature and extent to which civil and political rights and freedoms *actually* play an instrumental role.¹⁵ In other words, a formalistic electoral democracy provides *necessary* but not *sufficient* conditions for promoting economic and social rights and freedoms. While many interpretations of freedom see it as a precondition for action – I am free even though I may not make use of my freedom – the central argument here is that what matters most is to *act* freely. It is, therefore, important to study both the extent of freedoms guaranteed in a democracy and the ‘enabling conditions, institutional as well as social’ (Przeworski et al. 2000, 34) that allow individuals to act freely in the political sphere. Such freedoms may, however, vary considerably from situation to situation. Nonetheless, by studying such enabling conditions with regard to both individuals and institutions, it may be possible to explain *state capacity* to combat acute and endemic deprivation even when the formal mechanisms of an electoral democracy are in place.

There is also a need to recognise that by failing to protect economic and social rights, a democratic system can be undermined and damaged. Beetham (1999, 102) argues that this can occur in three main ways. First, the citizenship status of ‘those whose rights are unprotected and their capacity to exercise their civil and political rights along with others’ is undermined, such that social exclusion leads to political exclusion. Second, ‘it diminishes the quality of public life for all, through the loss of security to property and person, and the correspondingly intensified organization of repression.’ Third, the legitimacy of democratic institutions may be eroded, the extent of such erosion depending on the extent of denial of economic and social rights. In sum, without the protection of economic and social rights and freedoms, our capacity to exercise civil and political freedoms as free citizens may be undermined. For example, without the fulfilment of our basic needs to food, safe drinking water, shelter, health care, education, etc., we may not be totally free to exercise our political franchise. It is nonetheless difficult to argue that the protection of economic and social rights is a necessary condition

for the survival of democracy. In the light of the experience of countries like India, Sri Lanka and Botswana which continue to be stable electoral democracies – but where a large majority of their citizens live in poverty – it appears that formal democratic institutions may be undermined and yet survive despite the low level of protection of economic and social freedoms. Such cases strengthen the need to go beyond the intrinsic value of democracy to its actual instrumental use.

The crux of the argument here is that the promotion of ‘substantial freedom’ with democratic consolidation requires guarantees for both negative freedom in the form of absence of external interference in personal life, and positive freedom in the form of opportunities generated by the state to provide better conditions for citizens to enjoy their freedom. As Beetham (1999, 96–97) puts it, ‘legally established rights will be largely formalistic if the means necessary to exercise them are beyond people’s reach ... What value is the freedom of expression to me if I lack the means to communicate with other citizens?’ Thus it is important to be aware of and highlight the features of democracy that safeguard negative rights and freedoms (e.g. freedom from arbitrary arrest of an individual) while failing to protect the positive rights and freedoms to be free from starvation, to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated, etc.

At this juncture, it must be noted that the functioning of democratic institutions and the enjoyment of individual freedoms vary considerably from country to country and also, a fact sometimes overlooked, within a country itself. It is thus possible for a regime to maintain a minimum threshold of democracy and not be overly concerned with the guarantee and protection of positive rights and freedoms. Hence, the maintenance of democracy may simply be accompanied by the formal guarantee of certain freedoms, not their further promotion. As Bova (1997, 125) correctly argues, ‘democratisation does not by itself guarantee full respect for human rights, and in extreme cases, democratic elections can produce outcomes that are illiberal’. Even worse, democracy may also crush freedom. A good example of this is the case of Blacks in southern American states who enjoyed many rights before the introduction of democracy after the American civil war. In the reconstruction era that followed the civil war, Blacks lost many of these rights even though democratically

elected governments were placed in power (Sowell 1997, 52). One could, of course, argue whether this was really a democracy since Blacks did not have the right to vote but the point here is that the mere achievement of a threshold of democracy does not necessarily imply that freedoms will be automatically protected and furthered. Even in democracies that guarantee substantial freedoms, these may fall well short of original intentions and what is actually feasible given political will.

Variations in the level of practiced democracy are also present within a country. For instance, the practice of national level politics may be very different from the way democracy is perceived and practiced at local (e.g. village/district) levels. Just as there is no guarantee for substantial freedoms being allowed in democracies, there is similarly no clear relationship between ‘the strength of democracy at the national political level and that of institutions of accountability at the local level’ (Bardhan 1999). For instance, India is regarded as the world’s largest democracy. Indeed, the formal trappings of democracy are readily observable throughout the country primarily in the form of periodic elections and government based on a principle of separation of powers. However, the ‘formalness’ of democracy is strongest in the national and State capitals – the seats of legislative, executive and judicial power. In rural districts, particularly remote and inaccessible areas, even the formal (minimal) requirements of democracy are often not met. Hence, what constitutes free and fair electoral practice may be widely divergent between the Centre and the periphery, which also has a major impact on the types of freedoms enjoyed by individuals and groups.

Finally, we need to distinguish between ‘governance’ and democracy. Indeed, governance – a term dealing with how political power is exercised and how such power can be checked – has become one of the most popular buzzwords in the development vocabulary. And it is common to use governance together with a combination of the following adjectives: ‘effective’, ‘efficient’, ‘transparent’, ‘accountable’ (El-Mikawy and Oia 2009, 1). Democracy is, by contrast, seen to deal with the attainment of power that in turn is up for grabs based on a system of predictable intervals. And the corresponding adjectives for democracy include ‘liberal’, ‘electoral’, ‘representative’ and ‘deliberative’ (ibid.).

One of the interesting research questions related to democracy and development includes identifying a set of key determinants of lasting democracy. While some argue that demographic, economic and sociological variables explain the increase in the number of democracies in the world, others find that the decisive factors include the colonial experience, island status and Muslim heritage. Thus it is claimed that British rule in many parts of the world – particularly in Asia and the Caribbean – introduced local populations to electoral, legislative and judicial institutions (in particular rule of law) and hence such colonialism exercised a substantial amount of institutional influence that helped many former colonies to sustain these institutions upon independence (Weiner 1987; Clague et al. 2001). And even in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the evidence of lasting democracies is limited, the few countries that have been successful in maintaining democratic governments – such as Botswana and South Africa – have had a British connection (*ibid.*, 37). Similarly, it is claimed that small states and island states are highly correlated with lasting democracy due to relatively homogenous societies and that the share of the population professing Islam is negatively correlated since a general lack of public discourse discourages collective actions to reduce poverty and promote overall development (Kuran 1997).¹⁶ How, then, can we summarize the historical experience so far?

BRIEF HISTORY¹⁷

In the 1950s, several developing countries began experimenting with democratic rule. However, there were early failures due to factors like low per capita income, small middle-class groups, weak political parties and influential traditional elites who were not keen on state attempts to radically tackle inequality. Without stable political institutions, elites in these countries felt threatened by revolutionary activity and populist upsurge and, particularly in Latin America, allied with the military or external forces to re-establish elite-friendly authoritarian regimes. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was increased pessimism regarding the ability of democracy to promote economic development. There was increasingly a belief that authoritarianism provided a bulwark against disorder, and stable authoritarian regimes began enjoying a certain level of legitimacy.

A good example was the case of Nigeria, where the legitimacy of the military regime was expressed in terms of the military being an antidote to disorder. In other cases, regime legitimacy was established as being performance-based. For instance, the Brazilian military regime emphasised their intention and ability to maintain social order and promote economic development. The oil crisis in the 1970s, however, undermined the economic performance and growth efforts of most authoritarian regimes. In addition, other related factors were rampant corruption and the inability of military regimes to maintain social disorder.

The 1980s and the 1990s were decades when the transition from authoritarianism to democracy started once again. This followed the end of the Cold War and the early 1990s, in particular, was characterised by a wave of optimism on the prospect of mass conversions to democracy in the developing world. Indeed, Brazil's success in experimenting with democracy and economic growth and welfare started a bandwagon effect and many countries were inspired by these developments. In particular, Africa in the 1990s experienced a 'second liberation' and several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa legalised opposition parties and held competitive, multiparty elections. It is, of course, another matter that such elections have seldom met the minimal criteria of freeness and fairness.

THE CASE AGAINST DEMOCRACY

Starting in the late 1950s and continuing in the 1960s, several arguments, demonstrating a trade-off between democracy and development, were forwarded (Galenson 1959; de Schweinitz 1959; Huntington 1968). According to Przeworski and Limongi (1993), the two main arguments against democracy have traditionally related to the inability of democracies to promote investment and the argument that a democratically elected government is not insulated from particularistic pressures. Thus it was argued that democracy undermines investment as individuals with livelihoods near subsistence levels cannot afford to make intertemporal trade-offs. Rather, they have a need to fulfil their consumption needs immediately, which in turn affects economic growth. Under democracy, such pressures towards immediate consumption is encouraged, as for instance when labourers organise into unions and are able to secure

higher wages which in turn reduces profits and consequently investment. Similarly, when political parties contest for votes in a democracy, citizens are in a position to demand expensive social services, which in turn diverts resources from productive economic investment (*ibid.*, 54–57). Many economists during this era emphasised the importance of raising the rate of savings and investments, and Jagdish Bhagwati (1966, 204), one of the world's leading trade economists, argued in the mid-1960s that democracies were faced with a 'cruel choice' between rapid economic growth and democratic processes.¹⁸

In more recent times, a similar argument focusing on so-called 'Asian values' has often been espoused by some leaders – like the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad and the former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew – to justify the benefits of authoritarianism in promoting economic growth. The advocates of Asian values are less supportive of freedom and more concerned with order, discipline and economic development. They claim that human rights in the areas of political and civil liberties are less relevant and less appropriate in Asia than in the West. Rather, they point to a specific set of values shared by people of many different nationalities and ethnicities living in East Asia and Southeast Asia. Such values emphasise the following: a focus on the community rather than the individual; the privileging of order and harmony over personal freedom; the refusal to compartmentalise religion away from other spheres of life; a particular emphasis on saving and thriftiness, an insistence on hard work; a respect for political leadership; a belief that government and business need not necessarily be natural adversaries; emphasis on family loyalty.¹⁹

Others argue that democracy does not insulate the state from particularistic pressures. In order to best promote economic growth, state autonomy is essential. In democracies, interest groups compete for rents and continuously lobby and pressure the state in the hope of gaining benefits. However, the resulting situation is not conducive to economic growth and development as the state is forced to undertake suboptimal decisions (each interest group lobbying in contradictory directions) and public policy loses internal coherence (Becker 1983). Given this scenario, the state must be protected from diverging political pressures in order

to be able to function in a universalistic manner. As Haggard (1990, 262) puts it, 'Institutions can overcome these collective-action dilemmas by restraining the self-interested behaviour of groups through sanctions; collective-action problems can be resolved by command.'²⁰ He goes on to associate state autonomy with authoritarianism and argues that authoritarian regimes responsible for the East Asian miracles (e.g. high levels of economic development in South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan) have traditionally given political elites autonomy from distributive pressures. This enabled the state to extract resources, provide public goods, and impose the short-term costs associated with efficient economic adjustment.

While an abundance of natural resources was considered beneficial for development until a few decades ago, there is now a growing number of studies that suggest that rather than being a blessing, the abundance of specific types of natural resources makes it more likely for a country to experience low levels of economic growth, development, weakened democracy and even civil war (popularly known as the 'resource curse' hypothesis) (Rosser 2006). While the evidence provided by those supporting the resource curses argument has been criticised on the grounds that defining what constitutes 'natural resources' is problematic and that the methodology applied is fuzzy (Stevens 2003), a particularly interesting question in this context relates to whether the abundance of oil hinders the growth and fostering of democracy. Indeed, it is sometimes argued that the failure of high-income states in the Middle East to become democratic is precisely due to the fact that oil and democracy do not mix very well. Resources from oil can support and strengthen authoritarianism by allowing governments to combat pressures for transparency and accountability by pursuing a policy of low taxation and high spending (the 'rentier effect'), and by strengthening their security personnel to tackle protests and other challenges to their authority (the 'repression effect'). Moreover, the failure of large groups of people to find employment in industrial and service sector jobs makes it less likely that they will campaign for democracy (the 'modernization effect') (ibid., 356–357). And Ross (2001, 356) concludes that oil does indeed hurt the chances of democratisation but that such damage is greater in poor countries – not just in the Middle East but also in Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico and Nigeria.

The Venezuelan case is particularly interesting in this context. For the past decade or so, generous revenues from the country's vast oil resources have helped President Hugo Chávez fund many ambitious social welfare programmes (including forced land redistribution aimed at utilising idle land and making the country less dependent on food imports), keep domestic prices of fuel extremely low and create an atmosphere where ordinary Venezuelans, even during the latest financial crisis, have largely felt that they were on the path of economic success. But this has come at the price of political freedoms, and now that Chávez is set to rule for many years to come, without presidential term limits, there has been a steadily growing trend of repression of dissent (involving ordinary citizens, opposition politicians and the media), forced takeover of private companies and the centralisation of power in the hands of the President. Most analysts agree that such developments have severely endangered the prospects of democracy in Venezuela.

Finally, there are several countries that appear to do relatively well in terms of economic growth and political stability indicators despite not being democracies. Apart from the Middle East, the cases of Libya and Thailand appear relevant here. And one can argue that attempts at introducing ballot boxes in these countries have not really paid rich dividends. Indeed, in many cases, leaders in the Middle East (e.g. Syria, Egypt, Bahrain) have simply used voting as a tool to legitimise their continued hold on power. Similarly, the enormous support (particularly in rural areas of the country) for the democratically elected former Prime Minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra, did not prevent him from being overthrown and sent to exile in 2006 on charges of corruption and treason. Despite the fact that the military junta was replaced by a civilian government (without much popular support), democratic freedoms are under constant threat. The economy, however, appears unaffected and the impression given is that despite the political turmoil, the economic course that Thailand has embarked upon has not changed dramatically in the past few years.

THE CASE FOR DEMOCRACY

According to classical liberal ideas, political competition has a positive effect on state policymaking. Consequently, competition among political

parties and interest groups in a democracy provide a sound foundation for efficiency in macroeconomic performance (Gasiorowski 2000). In authoritarian regimes, government officials are ‘predators’ and use the government machinery for ‘rent-seeking’ purposes, i.e. they use repression to extract as much revenue as possible from society (Fattouh 1992). Although several studies in the 1990s agreed with the view that state autonomy is crucial for the promotion of economic development, they concluded that dictatorships actually created more inefficiency and thereby did not promote state autonomy (North 1990; Findlay 1990). For example, when farmers, industrialists and other producers know that they must surrender a portion of their produce to such rent-seeking officials, they may have little incentive to invest, and thereby promote, their ongoing activities. Thus Olson (1993) argues that although investment levels and economic growth rates vary considerably among non-democratic regimes, they generally remain low.

Authoritarian regimes produce high inflation and slow economic growth due to a combination of low investment rates, large fiscal deficits, weak monetary policy, chronic trade deficits and inefficient state bureaucracies. In contrast, democracy entails a system whereby ‘those who govern are selected through contested elections’ (Przeworski et al. 2000, 15), and this factor limits predatory behaviour among government officials. Political parties, interest organisations and an independent media ensure that representatives and representative institutions are held accountable and special interests curbed. Further, democratic regimes enjoy far greater legitimacy in national and international politics than authoritarian regimes. This factor also makes democracies politically more stable, allowing for the pursuit of effective macroeconomic policy (Feng 1997).

In this connection, Amartya Sen claims that no democracy has ever experienced a famine. Basing his analysis on an initial comparison between India and China, Sen argues that independent India has successfully prevented famines due to its democratic political structure. Indeed, in spite of near-famine conditions in 1965–66, 1970–73, and during the more recent droughts in the 1980s and the 1990s, the last major famine in India (the Bengal Famine) occurred in 1943–44, preceding independence.

In contrast, and as a direct consequence of the disastrous policies of the 'Great Leap Forward', China experienced a famine that lasted for three years (1958–61) and resulted in the deaths of 25–30 million people (Drèze and Sen 1989). According to Sen, the primary reason for India's success at preventing famine is effective 'public action' in Indian democracy (Sen 1987a; 1987b). He argues that by influencing government policy via political activism, criticism and opposition, many societal actors contribute towards eliminating famine. Opposition political parties, an active media and interest organisations ensure that the government is provided with 'early warning' information of human distress, which in turn triggers political authorities into taking preventive action. And if the government fails to undertake an appropriate response, the very same actors ensure that the ruling party is held accountable for its action or inaction.²¹ Like Sen, Bhagwati (1995) also advocates an instrumental justification for the primacy of political rights. Writing on 'the new thinking on development', he is of the view that the genuine social needs of public health, environmental protection and the elimination or relief of poverty 'cannot be met unless governments have the resources that only growth can generate' (ibid., 59). However, he adds that 'the use of these resources for such public needs will not automatically follow unless the political system provides the means and incentives to turn those needs into effective demands' (ibid.).

Finally, and in terms of cultural relativist positions like 'Asian values' which question democracy's contribution to development, Sen (1999, 13–14) has forcefully argued that 'It is very hard to find any real basis for this intellectual claim in the history of Asian cultures, especially if we look at the classical traditions of India, the Middle East, Iran, and other parts of Asia'. In a separate article, he tears apart the entire hypothesis by observing that 'The authoritarian readings of Asian values that are increasingly championed in some quarters do not survive scrutiny' (Sen 1997). Indeed, by questioning the futility of generalizing a set of values from the size and heterogeneity of countries in Asia, he argues that there is little empirical evidence that Asian countries share the common feature of being sceptical of freedom and liberty, while emphasizing order and discipline. Thus he writes:

The so-called Asian values that are invoked to justify authoritarianism are not especially Asian in any significant sense. Nor is it easy to see how they could be made, by the mere force of rhetoric, into an Asian cause against the West. The people whose rights are being disputed are Asians, and, no matter what the West's guilt may be (there are many skeletons in many closets throughout the world), the rights of Asians can scarcely be compromised on those grounds. The case for liberty and political rights turns ultimately on their basic importance and on their instrumental role. And this case is as strong in Asia as it is elsewhere. (Sen 1997)

Sen also notes that it is important to recognize diversity within culture and it is of little analytical use to oversimplify and speak of 'Western civilization,' 'African culture' or 'Asian values.' Such 'unfounded readings of history and civilisation are not only intellectually shallow, they also add to the divisiveness of the world in which we live' (ibid).

In terms of economic growth, the general view is that since democracies tend to prioritise social spending more than they emphasise investments, they often end up having trouble in attracting foreign capital and controlling inflation. On the positive side of things, democracies appear to place greater emphasis on human capital investments – education, health, etc. Authoritarian regimes, in contrast appear to prioritise physical capital investments (e.g. factories and equipment) and South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore are good examples in this context (Tavares and Wacziarg 2001). However, even though the focus on human capital investments in democracies is undertaken at the expense of physical capital accumulation, some believe that the long term benefits will come from the production of more diversified ideas, the free flow of information that is necessary in the advanced stages of the development process and the fact that democracies do not generally support monopolistic organisations and elite social groups who tend to dominate innovation and markets.²²

DEMOCRACY AND THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT

While democracy is said to provide increased voice and influence to the poor than non-democratic systems, many democracies in developing

countries are constantly struggling to achieve high rates of economic growth and reduce poverty. And the continued high rates of poverty in Nigeria, India, Brazil or South Africa beg the question as to whether democracies can indeed turn things around. Why is the democratic record at poverty reduction not better? And, how can democracies improve their development record? An important criterion for pro-poor policy success is the level and consistency of commitment practised by the political elite in a country. Ruling elites in both democratic and non-democratic governments can translate commitment, if it exists, into public policy by convincing state actors, especially bureaucrats to vigorously implement anti-poverty schemes. Varshney (1999) terms this the ability to exert ‘pressure from above’. However, democratic systems have the capability to enable elected representatives to adopt and change public policy in very different ways from that of, for instance, authoritarian regimes. The citizens of a democratic country – by way of political mobilisation and by virtue of the power of their vote – have the ability to influence government policy and hence exert ‘pressure from below’. This mechanism, unlike the ‘pressure from above’, is available only in democratic systems in a regular and periodic manner (*ibid.*). The pertinent question at this stage is whether a democracy with a large majority of its population below the poverty line can actually feel enough ‘pressure from below’. If they don’t, why is that so? If they do, what causes the gap between pressures from below and the actual outcomes? In the following, I will discuss three sets of interrelated issues – elections and voting patterns, choice of economic strategy and implementation of public policy – that tend to limit the ability of democracies to pursue viable pro-poor development policies. Hence, whether and the extent to which democracy can play the saviour role that is often expected of it, appears unclear.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING PATTERNS

Several Western countries and multilateral agencies have in recent decades emphasised the crucial role that elections play in promoting development and freedoms of various kinds. There is indeed general agreement that elections can pave the way for the establishment of a

political culture where civil and political rights on the one hand and social, economic and cultural rights on the other are respected, protected and promoted. The success stories here have, however, not been many, particularly in Africa with recent setbacks in Kenya, Nigeria, Congo and Zimbabwe. The usual problems have been related to ineffective electoral arrangements, electoral malpractices, but most importantly, rulers not willing to relinquish power even when they lose the popular vote. But there have been some exceptions, like President Mathieu Kérékou of Benin who accepted defeat at the hands of his Prime Minister and left office without resistance. Since then only a handful of African leaders have followed suit; indeed one of the continent's current ills is related to presidents seeking to get re-elected for a third term in office, a feature prohibited by most African constitutions. Similar problems also exist in Latin America, the most well-known being President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela who celebrated ten years in office by winning a referendum in February 2009 that will in effect allow him to retain power for many years to come. Two recent events in Africa, however, deserve special mention. The December 2008–January 2009 presidential elections held in Ghana provide an example of how things can be if everything runs according to plan. Although the incumbent president Nana Akufo-Addo won the first round by a small margin of votes, the ensuing run-off elections gave the opposition candidate John Atta Mills a small majority. And despite a recount exercise, the opposition won – its candidate having received 50.2 per cent of the vote – the smallest margin of victory in Africa's electoral history. The most impressive aspect, however, was the willingness of the loser to concede defeat.²³ Another success story is that of Botswana, which since independence in 1966 has regularly held multi-party elections, considered largely to have been free and fair. The latest elections, held in October 2009, were a routine affair and the country subsequently topped polls as Africa's best governed country. The achievement appears all the more surprising given the enormous challenges the country faces in relation to combating the extremely high incidence of HIV/AIDS and high levels of rural poverty despite being blessed with an abundance of mineral resources, including diamonds.

Recent evidence, particularly from the Middle East, paints a disturbing picture, however. Indeed, recent elections at various levels – from national parliaments to local councils – held in 2007 in Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Syria, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia appear, according to democracy advocates, to have largely benefited authoritarian rulers who have used the event of organising an election to strengthen their claims of legitimacy. Thus the presidential elections in Syria were in reality a referendum involving one candidate while parliamentary elections in Bahrain or municipal council elections in Saudi Arabia are more about quenching public thirst for more accountable government, despite the fact that these bodies are not accorded substantial powers. Indeed, as one member of a municipal council in Saudi Arabia observed, ‘There is a state of depression and lack of trust, or faith, among the Arab masses in the regimes and little belief that these elections can lead to change aspired to.’²⁴ There is thus good reason to be concerned about the perception that is being created in the general population regarding the purpose of holding such elections. Similarly, the credibility of Afghanistan’s recently re-elected president Hamid Karzai remains in serious doubt after an expensive election in August–September 2009 was largely believed to have been a heavily flawed process characterised by electoral fraud and intimidation.

Consider another example, that of Congo, where in late 2006, an historic election was held that cost an approximately half a billion us dollars – among the most expensive in Africa ever. But three years later, the country appears no better off than it was before the elections and corruption, conflict and mismanagement are largely the order of the day. Nigeria, the nation blessed with a vast oil wealth, but where the large majority live in poverty, is another example in point. Despite some improvements in overall development and in some reduction in the incidence of corruption since the days of authoritarian rule, the experiment with democracy in terms of development has been largely disappointing. And apart from rigging (where thugs routinely steal ballot boxes), intimidation of political opponents and widespread corruption of political institutions, the election process is neither transparent nor involves the voter in a proper manner in the process of choosing representatives.

Thus in the run up to the April 2007 elections, and fearing widespread electoral abuse, a leading newspaper wrote the following in its editorial: '[the] election has brought Nigeria to the crossroads of an emergency ... the options available to save the country from impending danger are now very few indeed ... The usual, easy route is to advocate putting up with the charade. Not rocking the boat ... But Nigeria today is beyond such simplistic postulation'.²⁵

Thus, and writing on elections and reform in failing states, Chauvet and Collier (2007, 16) conclude that 'elections can be both too frequent and too infrequent: there is an optimal frequency' and that 'a little democracy appears to be dysfunctional, whereas sufficient democratization is superior to autocracy, at least in terms of reform momentum'. Thus, while it is worthwhile to emphasise that periodic elections are definitely better than a system where no elections are held, it is nonetheless more important to look into how such elections are conducted in the first place and the manner in which such events can 'exert both greater pressure for accountability and confer greater legitimacy on the winner' (ibid.). And Robert Dahl's point discussed earlier, regarding the institutionalisation of certain rights before elections can be meaningful, appears especially relevant in this context.

Related to the above is the fact that in a large majority of developing countries, the actual participation of the poor, particularly women, does not reflect their numbers in society. Many poor people are excluded from, or do not participate actively in, the political process. Herein is an interesting dilemma. A large majority of the population in developing countries find it difficult to earn enough money for daily survival. It seems logical that if these poor groups exercised their freedom to vote in a unified and constructive manner, then they would enjoy substantial influence over government policy. However, several studies have shown that the poor do not vote according to their economic status. Indeed, when the poor participate in the political process, their 'class' identities (as poor people in general or more specifically as small farmers, landless, wage workers, tenants, recipients of food subsidies, etc.) often exist together with other conflicting identities (Moore and Putzel 1999; Varshney 1999). These range from ethnic, linguistic and regional ties to

individual patronage ties to specific political parties and their leaders. This means that voting trends among the poor reveal a fragmented picture. India is a good example in this context. Apart from elections being a very difficult and expensive exercise to undertake (the latest in 2009 was divided into five phases, totalling four weeks, involving 6.5 million staff and 838,804 polling stations), the electoral campaigns typically tend to be characterised by personalities (e.g. film actors, soap opera stars, children and spouses of erstwhile politicians), financial muscle (campaign financing is not as well regulated as it ought to be) and intimidation of opponents. And in recent years, the results of successive elections have shown how political parties with a religious, language and regional focus have triumphed at both national and state level elections, having divided the votes of the poor.

Poverty in developing countries is especially acute in rural areas where it is often difficult to sustain effective organisations that involve poor people on a continuous basis. Communication and travel is difficult and information is scarce. The poor, especially indigenous groups, who reside in remote and often inaccessible rural areas, have traditionally been neglected by the ruling elites. Political parties are usually active in these areas only in the period immediate to elections. Once the elections are over, the promises of electrifying villages, building roads, improving the education and health systems and putting into motion long-term economic investments gradually fade away. Given the weak political voice (lack of forceful articulation of their needs) that characterizes such poor groups, the perpetuation of poverty continues. Sometimes the poor are also prevented from voting for the leaders of their choice. Local coercion may be exercised on the voter such that he is not in a position to vote according to his true interests. Political parties in many developing countries, for instance, India, have routinely made use of tactics of intimidation to coerce the poor and vulnerable to vote for them (Banik 2007). When influential local political leaders come to power, the tendency is to undertake populist measures and distribute the benefits of development among individuals and groups who voted for them. Those who refuse to support these politicians risk being denied government benefits in the immediate future.

PUBLIC POLICY AND POLITICIANS AS 'SAVIOURS'

A major obstacle to development efforts in poor countries, be they democracies or non-democracies, has been ineffective implementation of anti-poverty schemes (Banik 2001). There has traditionally been an overwhelming emphasis on 'top-down' approaches where experts, often far-removed from the problems faced by the poor, attempt to define what disadvantaged groups need. In contrast, there is far less emphasis on 'bottom-up' processes where the poor themselves are involved in articulating their needs. Indeed, this predominance of the top-down approach together with the lack of correspondence between programme goals and implementation realities has rendered many anti-poverty schemes in developing countries ineffective. For example, a study on the implementation of a health strategy in Guatemala documents several shortcomings in the system. Some of the major challenges to successful implementation relates to lack of knowledge among policy formulators on the problems facing local communities, lack of communication among implementing officials, and lack of continuity in the top ranks of the health services as personnel are constantly on the move and transferred from one department to another (Thomassen 2003). A study of implementation of drought relief and anti-poverty programmes in India also arrives at a similar conclusion (Banik 2007).

Successful formulation and implementation of public policy requires the presence of a well-functioning administrative apparatus. Even when a country becomes a democracy, it does not mean that it inherits a strong, stable and competent administrative infrastructure. Indeed, a major challenge for most poor countries is to establish clear procedures for recruitment and training of competent civil servants based on a system of merit. This requires a strong political will to undertake substantial administrative reforms that risk being opposed by powerful bureaucrats who fear the loss of their privileged positions. In this context, Hydén (1997) argues that patrimonialism is a major barrier towards the promotion of democracy and a rational-legal form of public administration in Africa. In most developing countries, civil servants often complain of increasing political interference in administrative activities. This, they argue, seriously undermines bureaucratic initiative and bureaucratic neutrality and is a

major source of demotivation in the civil services. This is indeed a major problem. Political leaders often resort to clientelism and are particularly concerned with ensuring that their supporters (who are not necessarily poor) receive a large share of government goods and services even when these are aimed at the poor and vulnerable sections of the population. Thus, excessive political interference leads to implementation failures as the wisdom of qualified civil servants is overridden by dubious political interests. However, and increasingly so, civil servants themselves seek favours from politicians in the hope of furthering their careers (and income). Consequently, the unholy nexus between a number of corrupt politicians, private contractors and disloyal bureaucrats contributes to an enormous wastage of public resources and continued difficulties for intended beneficiaries of development programmes. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that 'political interference' can also have a positive influence on public policy. Without sustained political support, the general trend is in favour of ad hoc intervention as civil servants do not have the ability to radically change or adapt policies which have inherent weaknesses. There is thus a greater need for civil servants (as implementers) to provide critical and regular feedback to politicians (as policymakers). It is the lack of such contact between policymakers and implementers that often explains implementation failure in many poor countries.

Finally, in many developing country democracies, elected political leaders often appear to maintain the structures and processes that facilitate the continuation of poverty. Politicians, therefore, have incentives to ensure that the poor continue to remain poor (Banik and Brekke 2004). Let me illustrate this with the following example: The presence of a large class of extremely poor people facing starvation and destitution in a particular area or region vulnerable to natural hazards (e.g. drought) creates opportunities for political leaders to project themselves as 'saviours' of the poor and the destitute. The argument is that particularly during periods of acute (natural or man-made) crises, elected political leaders are keen to undertake – or at least give the impression of being concerned with – emergency measures that are aimed at preventing a further worsening of the living conditions of the poor. By doing so, they expect to gain political support both from the group of poor people 'saved' from

imminent destitution, and from other groups in society who approve of the way the leaders have handled the crisis, particularly on the issue of provision of emergency relief.

In addition, political leaders are also keen on avoiding accountability for past failures that caused or further aggravated the vulnerability of the poor in the first place. Thus, when faced with a major crisis, a common strategy for many leaders is to focus on short-term, and often cosmetic, initiatives aimed at stopping criticism from civil society actors and the media. This would appear quite acceptable had not such crises (e.g. drought-induced) taken place on a regular basis. The focus on playing the role of the saviour – seen by many leaders as important for re-election – prevents the formulation and implementation of development policies with a long-term perspective. This is where human rights-based approaches to development have the potential of making a major impact by focusing on greater participation of the poor at all stages of development and increased accountability of those in authority. There is thus an urgent need in developing countries to recognize that the poor have rights and that domestic and international actors have obligations to protect, fulfil and promote the rights of the poor. This entails a move away from notions of charity (where politicians regularly play the role of the saviour) to one where rights and duties are central.

ECONOMIC POLICIES AIMED AT GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION

As noted earlier, democracies appear to choose expensive and short-term oriented policies aimed at providing immediate and direct relief to their citizens. It is generally not possible to keep the variable of economic strategy constant since this varies considerably, depending immensely on the type of regime in power and the political culture of the country in question. And there continue to be disagreements over whether it is better to pursue a growth-mediated or a redistribution-oriented economic strategy in the developmental process of Third World countries.

Growth-mediated strategies do not aim for any kind of growth, but one that aims at creating more opportunities for increasing the incomes of the population. These strategies entail long-term measures like exchange rate devaluations, tariff reductions, privatisation of public en-

terprises and a market-oriented strategy. However, these also tend to ignore the extremely strong and probably overwhelming resistance to ex-post facto income redistribution, whereby benefits tend to 'trickle up' instead of 'trickling down' in structurally unequal environments. In contrast, redistribution-oriented strategies aim for the public provision of income or assets to the poor through producer and credit subsidies, poor-based employment programmes, land reforms, food subsidies, etc. Such interventions are short-term and focus directly on groups classified to fall under the poverty line. They are particularly useful when they help reduce economically based rural powerlessness by weakening the hold of traditional land-owning elites, so that at a later stage redistributed assets can be vigorously supported by state policy. However, redistribution-oriented strategies are not always the best for long-term economic development for the country. In mainstream economics, there appears to be a general preference for growth-mediated strategies where labour-intensive schemes are implemented together with an external liberalisation of the economy.

Democracies with high rates of poverty have generally not chosen such interventions but have preferred to focus on redistribution-oriented strategies. Varshney (1999) argues that this is a major reason for the failure of such countries to combat poverty successfully. Most politicians in democracies are concerned with winning elections. In this process, it is far more attractive to deliver short-term remedies to the poor, who do not have the patience to wait for substantial long-term benefits that could accrue from growth-mediated macroeconomic interventions. Thus even when a country can achieve a faster and higher rate of economic growth through growth-mediated interventions, democratically elected leaders opt for short-term, populist and costly redistribution-oriented interventions aimed at securing re-election.

Drèze and Sen (1989), however, defend redistribution-oriented interventions and argue that these strategies also have their own merits. They point to the fact that although India and China started development planning roughly at the same time, 1947 and 1949, respectively, China has achieved far more success in promoting human development than India.²⁶ Particularly in the pre-1979 period, when both countries had

similar levels of economic growth, there was a tremendous surge in health and longevity in China. There was a radical improvement in the extension and maintenance of health networks with cooperative medical systems, commune clinics and a drastic increase in the number of doctors and nurses available in rural areas. This was supplemented by an efficient public distribution system for the provision of subsidised food to the poor. Despite similar attempts at redistribution-oriented interventions, India did not experience much success, especially in rural areas where the majority of India's population resides. This was primarily due to a failure to target the poor successfully, uneven implementation by many regional governments and widespread corruption. Thus Drèze and Sen argue that China's fantastic achievements in promoting human development are largely due to a successful policy of redistribution in the pre-1979 period.

In recent years, the Chinese growth experience has been impressive and analysts predict that the Chinese economy will be bigger than that of the United States by 2027 (Jacques 2009). The flip side of the coin, however, is that individuals in China will on average still remain poorer than in Western Europe and North America. And there remains a considerable amount of uncertainty associated with such projections, particularly in relation to social and political turmoil in the country. There are indeed several parts of China where people enjoy living standards comparable to that of industrialised countries, but there is considerable uncertainty as to how, in the immediate future, the benefits from economic growth will be fairly distributed to other areas of the country that are lagging behind in terms of human development. Another interesting trend in recent years has been China's growing interest in Africa and its eagerness to provide loans and grants to African governments for various programmes aimed at extracting mineral resources and undertaking infrastructural development. Western powers have accused China of introducing a new form of imperialism, but most recipients of such assistance have reacted positively thus far. The Chinese have, however, argued that their interest in Africa is beneficial to both parties, Africa is finally getting the capital it so desperately needs and China will have access to mineral deposits (including oil) that are essential to the continuous growth of its booming economy.

China has also of late been portrayed as a state where rapid economic development has occurred largely in the absence of respect for the rule of law. But this does not capture the entire picture. While the government has in fact attempted to promote its rule of law agenda, it has thus far had little impact in the villages. However, and in addition to the growing number of non-governmental organisations in the country, there have been emerging forms of legal activism in rural areas. And peasant lawyers – who live in the countryside, have no formal legal training and provide gratis legal advice – have managed to fill an important vacuum in this respect by gaining knowledge about laws and judicial processes and passing this on to fellow villagers, even defending them in court (Brandtstädter 2008). Their areas of speciality include cases that are seldom prioritised by formal legal institutions, for example various forms of abuse of power by party cadres, including illegal expropriation of land, extortion of fees and taxes, forced abortions and destruction of local environmental resources. Given the very political nature of the cases they handle, peasant lawyers have become the surprise package around which there is a growing movement on human rights issues and the rule of law in rural China.

The discussion so far illustrates that the relationship between growth and redistribution is generally indeterminate. According to Bhagwati (1988), both growth-mediated and redistribution-oriented strategies can reduce poverty. The key issue is which method is more productive (how resources are used) and sustainable in the long-term, i.e. the financing of the provision of public resources without impairing the capacity to continue providing such resources. Thus, while growth is beneficial to the poor in some cases, it is not in others. Why is this so? There appear to be five sets of crucial issues that deserve mention. First, it appears that the level of initial inequality in a society is important. If a society suffers from a high level of initial inequality then economic growth will not be well distributed as traditional elites are in control of key resources. Where income inequality is already high, rapid economic growth may worsen income inequality. In addition, the rates of return on asset concentrations will be high (Alesina and Rodrik 1991). Second, the pattern of growth itself is crucial. For instance, rapid economic growth in the agricultural

sector can result in labour displacement. This was the case during the Green Revolution in the 1970s when the introduction of mechanised farming resulted in increased rates of unemployment for landless agricultural labourers in Mexico, India and the Philippines. Third, depending on traditional land ownership patterns in a society, asset redistribution, especially in the form of land reforms, is a highly effective tool for the reduction of inequality. However, implementing land reforms is also a very challenging task for the state, and requires a strong political will to enable the bureaucracy to undertake bold measures. Non-democracies with highly centralised power structures, like Communist states and military dictatorships, have enjoyed more success when they have linked up with decentralised forces in implementing land reforms. For example, in China, the actual task was undertaken by local communities while in South Korea, land reforms were eventually implemented by the armed force personnel and local organisations. Fourth, the nature of politics and public policies often determine how successfully economic growth can improve the wellbeing of the poor. Attempts to accelerate economic development and reduce poverty are fundamentally political issues which often run into political obstacles. Any deliberate redistribution will hurt the wealthy and the powerful who in turn will oppose such redistributive attempts. It is here that there is a need for democracies to have a concentrated coercive power to confront the power of property. This also requires considerable local knowledge and involvement. It is therefore essential that the centre is linked closely with the periphery. Fifth, cultural factors often play an important role on the enjoyment of rights and freedoms of women, children, the handicapped and the aged. Reducing poverty and income inequality within these groups is more often than not dependent on their status in society. Democracies, therefore, need to ensure that the rights and freedoms of minorities and vulnerable groups are well protected in the political system.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Economic crises tend to be regime transformers and the latest financial crisis, with its global impact, has perhaps laid the foundations for transi-

tions from authoritarianism to democracy and vice versa in many countries. A lesson from history is that the timing of democratic transitions is often crucial to the kind of economic growth strategy a country pursues, the growth it is able to achieve and the eventual emphasis on poverty reduction by the political leadership. Often, a transition from authoritarianism to democracy in patrimonial societies may result in increased political liberties without much economic development. The challenge is therefore to secure both political and economic freedoms. And in this quest the current faith in democracy as a saviour, where elections will solve all problems in poor countries, appears misplaced. Indeed, many current democracies in the developing world appear to fulfil the procedural requirements of democracy although the actual functioning of the system may actually be detrimental to the needs of the large majority of the population who remain poor. In other words, the challenge for democracies is not merely to achieve economic growth but to also include successful interventions aimed at reducing poverty and inequality. In this task, a focus on human capital formation is of the utmost importance. Investments in nutrition, health and education are necessary to create economically productive countries. And although democracies tend to prioritise expensive social spending at the expense of physical capital accumulation, the long term benefits will in the end result from the institutionalisation of creative and diversified ideas that is channelled through the free flow of information. Despite this, democracies need to re-visit the reasons behind the limited success of the provision of social welfare. And the availability of limited resources appears to be one of the main culprits, which brings us back to the need for rapid economic growth. A major form of accumulating public resources is through taxation. However, most poor countries, including democracies face the problem of whom they should tax. The rich usually oppose increases in taxation and the agricultural sector is informal and unorganised. Even when revenue is collected, the challenge lies in where and how it will be distributed. It also turns out that some democracies do well as high growers for a few decades and then suddenly stop. In general, democracy appears to have a greater impact on development in middle-income and less patrimonial societies like South Korea, Argentina and Brazil. Particularly in the

context of Sub-Saharan Africa, radical administrative reform is required in order to reduce the impact of patrimonialism and to increase the effectiveness of democratic political institutions. At the same time it is important to accept that such changes will not come about overnight but will, most probably, be the outcome of a long process.

The West was always, in previous decades, the defining point as to why some could while others could not achieve economic development. Now this attitude is changing with success stories also emerging from within the developing world. However, while democracy is now firmly established in so-called 'emerging powers' India and Brazil, the political future of China remains uncertain. The initial success of South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore in achieving rapid economic growth while suppressing political freedoms may continue to appear attractive to many countries in the developing world. However, as Amartya Sen observes, democratic political rights are important not only for the fulfilment of pressing economic needs but they are also crucial for the formulation of such needs. Consequently, we need to go beyond viewing the role of democracy simply as one of saviour to an understanding of how the institutionalisation of certain rights, the performance of democratic institutions between elections and the existence of a competitive political party system, which regularly and effectively aggregates and articulates the political *and* economic needs of the poor, can help eradicate poverty.

THE RHETORICAL APPEAL

Among the most talked about issues in politics today at both international and domestic levels is human rights. Thus, demonstrations questioning the validity of the presidential elections in Iran or the detainment of two American journalists in North Korea in the first half of 2009 are typically framed in human rights language in the international political and media discourse. The same applies to the plight of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese political leader who has been under house arrest for more than a decade, despite winning the elections outright in 1990. Surprisingly, even those accused of violating human rights appear to respond to such accusations with a rhetorical appeal couched in rights when claiming that others (e.g. Western countries) are the ones at fault and the *true* violators. Indeed, human rights – despite being a relatively new term (having formally existed since 1945) and replacing terms such as ‘natural rights’ and ‘the rights of Man’ – has now become a popular topic, and not as shunned as it was during the Cold War period. And there is growing acceptance that human beings, irrespective of where they live, have certain common goals related to life and well-being, both at individual and collective levels, that they cherish.

Despite the above, human rights remain a thorny issue, a barbed wire in international relations with numerous disagreements over their origins, professed universal character and its applicability in promoting development. The development of the human rights ideology has largely followed a parallel trajectory to that of development think-

ing and practice. But it was only in the 1990s that efforts to promote closer synergy between approaches to development and human rights gained momentum. Corresponding to the evolvement of the discourse on vulnerabilities to food, shelter, water and health, was the interest shown by academics, voluntary organisations, bilateral and multilateral development organisations and others in viewing poverty reduction as a matter of human rights. This took place against the backdrop of growing criticism of the relative failure of so-called ‘conventional’ development strategies – encouraged and pursued by national and international agencies – to eradicate poverty. The solution, many argued, was to adopt a human rights-based approach to development (hereafter HRBA).

The general consensus among its supporters is that the HRBA is a conceptual framework for the 1) process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and 2) operationally aimed at promoting and protecting human rights (OHCHR 2006). It is claimed that the HRBA is an important tool not only for poverty *reduction* but also in efforts to combat poverty *production* since it entails a comprehensive re-definition of the aims and approaches to development such that the boundaries between human rights and development disappear. Indeed most adherents agree that the approach ‘creates claims and not charity’ or philanthropy and hence ‘the end of development ... differs, and consequently the whole process of thinking about it, of defining the nature of the problem, changes as well – a new vision emerges’ (Uvin 2004, 129). And the argument today in some quarters is therefore that an HRBA approach enjoys several advantages over traditional development strategies. Among such advantages is the ability to ensure genuine *participation* of the poor and to better ensure *accountability* of policymakers and implementers. As Urban Jonsson (2003, 16) very succinctly puts it, ‘A human right represents a specific relationship between an individual who has a valid claim and another individual, group, or institution (including the state) with a duty to respect, protect, and fulfil the right’. He goes on to argue that ‘Except for very young children, all individuals have both valid claims (rights) and duties’. Similarly, there is considerable emphasis in the HRBA of the

process of development and the manner in which development policies are implemented. In other words, ‘the means, the processes, are different, even if many of the goals remain the same’ (Uvin 2004, 129). And Jonsson (2003, 20) goes on to add that ‘A human rights approach will change *what* most UN development agencies are doing; *how* they work, and particularly *why* they do their work’.

The growing popularity of the linkage between human rights and poverty reduction in the development discourse, however, appears to be more an exercise in rhetorical appeal than actual impact. I therefore believe we must first critically examine the normative foundations of whether – how and to what extent – a human rights-based approach (HRBA) can help to reduce poverty. While some developmental organisations, mainly in the United Nations system, claim that a focus on human rights can provide a sense of urgency to global efforts aimed at combating poverty and hunger, others (mainly individual voices in the World Bank and IMF) argue that the actual impact at the national, regional and local levels is limited. While there is a rich and growing literature on human rights-based approaches to development and poverty reduction – including the rights to food, water and health – I will argue that there is an urgent need to focus on how global theory can be operationalised into effective national practice. Thus in the second part of this essay, I will concentrate primarily on the challenges associated with implementing an HRBA at the national and local levels. The empirical focus is poverty and political culture in Malawi and I will try to nuance the discourse on HRBA by highlighting concrete implementation and programming challenges that the human rights rhetoric often does not adequately provide for. I will further argue that there must be greater focus on issues related to accountability (particularly in relation to donors, multilateral institutions and civil society organisations), unfair transnational practices, and unequal power relations that negatively affect the poor. Most importantly, and particularly if the above two issues remain unaddressed, is the danger that an HRBA, like other approaches before it, will be drained of political power and prove to be difficult to implement at the national and local levels. It is of the essence therefore to convert the rhetorical appeal of human rights to implementable policy.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

At the outset it is necessary to clarify what is currently meant by human rights. One can identify five core features or ‘widely accepted (and interrelated) postulates’ of human rights (Weston 2006, 20). First, human rights are both individual and group demands related to political power, wealth, enlightenment and other cherished values. Accordingly, human rights ‘imply both claims against persons and institutions impeding the realization of these values or capabilities, and standards for judging the legitimacy of laws and traditions’. Second, human rights are considered to be fundamental in nature as compared to other non-essential goods or claims. Third, human rights refer to a wide range of value claims ‘ranging from the most justifiable to the most aspirational’ and hence they ‘partake of both the legal and the moral orders, sometimes indistinguishably’ (ibid.). Fourth, human rights are often ‘qualified by the limitation that the rights of individuals or groups in particular instances are restricted as much as is necessary to secure the comparable rights of others and the aggregate common interest’ (ibid.). Finally, human rights are ‘quintessentially general or universal in character, in some sense equally possessed by all human beings everywhere’ (ibid.).

Such an understanding of human rights has helped focus a considerable amount of global attention on a range of binding treaties signed by a large number of UN member countries over the years. This list include the so-called seven ‘core’ UN international human rights treaties: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, adopted in 1966), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR, 1966), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT, 1984), Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), and International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (MWC, 1990).

Until around the mid-1980s, most attention was, however, reserved for civil and political rights. Things changed somewhat with the Declara-

tion on the Right to Development in 1986, Article 1 of which provided that ‘The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized’. It also stated that ‘The human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development’ (Article 2) and that ‘States have the right and the duty to formulate appropriate national development policies that aim at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals, on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of the benefits resulting therefrom’ (Article 3). The declaration, however, was mired in controversy in its initial years and largely ignored; it was only in the late 1990s, that it began to attract renewed interest (Andreasen 2006).

However, earnest efforts to integrate human rights and development began only in the 1990s when there was an increase in the talk of the abolition of poverty as a matter of international redistributive justice, and as a human rights problem. After decades of giving priority to the protection of civil and political rights, many actors began showing an interest in economic, social and cultural rights. Accordingly, it was argued that the characteristic features of human rights can not only contribute to promoting greater commitment to development, taking into consideration the genuine interests of the poor (articulated by the poor themselves), but can also result in increased accountability and scrutiny of actions that profess to promote development and reduce poverty. An important result of such an orientation was the UN Millennium Declaration (2000), where world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to do their utmost to help individuals and groups facing ‘the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty’ and committed themselves ‘to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want’. A further manifestation of this commitment was the appointment – by the United Nations – of an *Independent Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty*.

In theoretical terms, a human rights-based approach (HRBA) draws considerable inspiration from the early work of ethicists concerned with poverty such as Henry Shue and his analysis of basic rights with regard to us foreign aid. According to Shue (1996), the right to subsistence is necessary for individuals to enjoy any other right, and the lack of basic needs incapacitates people from engaging in autonomous activity and therefore enjoying any rights that protect such activity. All human rights require corresponding positive and negative duties. Three types of duties, in particular, correspond to each human right: a duty not to deprive the right-holder of the object of the right, a duty to protect right-holders against basic deprivations, and a duty to help those who are already deprived.

The work of the economist-philosopher Amartya Sen, which addresses development and poverty in terms of lack of capabilities and absence of freedoms, has also been important for the growing interest in the conceptual linkages between research on the notions of human development and human rights. Sen (1992; 1999) argues that development should be a means to improving human well-being and agency. Thus, human beings constitute the ‘ends’ of economic activity, rather than its means. Consequently, economic, political, legal, and other social arrangements should be evaluated according to how they expand people’s capabilities. Sen’s understanding of ‘capabilities’ includes what individuals are actually able to do and to be, that is, their freedom to enjoy valuable beings and doings; and poverty is the result of a failure of basic capabilities to function. In other words, poverty is capability deprivation, which includes the capability of being adequately nourished, leading a long and healthy life, being literate, etc.

In the past few years, another influential thinker has been the philosopher Thomas Pogge, who forcefully argues that ‘the global poor have a compelling moral claim to some of our affluence and that we, by denying them what they are morally entitled to and urgently need, are actively contributing to their deprivations’ (Pogge 2005, 4). And by maintaining poverty in the world, affluent countries are committing the most serious of human rights violations in history (Pogge 2002). The challenge therefore is to unambiguously contextualise the fight against poverty as a matter of global justice, since the poor are powerless within a system of injustice.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT (HRBA)

The main focus areas of an HRBA include analyzing inequalities, discriminatory practices and imbalance in power relations that often are the main obstacles to development. In the process of formulating poverty reduction policies, the approach recommends the inclusion of the following elements and principles: 'identifying and prioritizing action to improve the situation of the poorest; analyzing the underlying power relations and the root causes of discrimination; ensuring that both the process and the concrete poverty reduction targets are consistent with international human rights standards; ensuring close links between macroeconomic design, sectoral initiatives, and "governance" components and principles such as transparency and accountability; ensuring a basic standard of civil and political rights guarantees for active, free and meaningful participation, including freedom of information and freedom of association; identifying indicators and setting benchmarks so that the progressive realization of economic and social rights can clearly be monitored' (OHCHR 2006, 9).

While an HRBA was generally neglected until the end of the 1990s, it has, in the past decade, received increased attention particularly from UN agencies, international civil society organisations and donor agencies. For example, UNICEF was one of the early pioneers of HRBA in relation to the rights of children and UNESCO has in recent years attempted to explore the claim that extreme poverty is a 'violation' of human rights. With growing criticism of the relative failure of so-called 'conventional' development strategies pursued by national and international agencies to eradicate poverty, a number of international organisations and agencies (e.g. UNICEF, UNDP, CARE, OXFAM and several bilateral aid agencies) have thrown their weight behind this approach. There also appears to be general consensus regarding the interdependence of human development and human rights approaches as illustrated by the UNDP in its *Human Development Report 2000*. Human development is seen to share a common vision with human rights in that the final goal is human freedom. Indeed, human development and human rights are mutually reinforcing in the sense that they help to promote and maintain the well-

being and dignity of all people, building self-respect and the respect of others (UNDP 2000, 56–72).

A HRBA is said to enjoy several advantages over traditional development strategies including the ability to ensure genuine participation of the poor and to better ensure accountability of policymakers and implementers. The human rights framework introduces the important idea that certain actors have duties to facilitate and foster development (OHCHR 2006). Of particular importance is that an HRBA creates ‘claims’ and ‘duties’ as opposed to ‘philanthropy’ and ‘charity’ that characterises traditional development (Uvin 2004, 129). Moreover, an HRBA greatly influences the implementation of development programmes in that ‘the means, the processes, are different, even if many of the goals remain the same’. Human rights therefore ‘contribute to human development by guaranteeing a protected space where the elite cannot monopolize development processes, policies and programmes’ (ibid.).

While there is considerable agreement in international human rights law in recognising the obligations of the state, an HRBA importantly entails an extension of the ‘claim-duty relationships to include all relevant subjects and objects at sub-national, community, and household levels’ (Jonsson 2004, 4). Moreover, a focus on human rights can guarantee ‘a protected space where the elite cannot monopolise development processes, policies and programmes’ (ibid.). Linking human rights to development actually forces development practitioners to confront the tough questions of their work: matters of power and politics, exclusion and discrimination, structure and policy (Uvin 2004). And as Arjun Sen-gupta puts it, ‘if poverty is considered as a violation of human rights it could mobilize public action which itself may significantly contribute to the adoption of appropriate policies, especially by Governments in democratic countries’ (Sengupta 2005, para. 23).

At this stage it is important to distinguish between ‘rights-based development’ and ‘human rights-based development’, since these terms result in some confusion when used interchangeably by various international organisations and aid agencies. Eide (2006, 250) argues, for instance, that a rights-based approach can ‘cover any kind of rights and is locally determined as a result of power relations’ and can include ‘established

property rights irrespective of whether their origin, use or inheritance principles are “just”. By comparison, a human rights-based approach ‘builds on the international normative system of rights and the obligations undertaken by (most) states, which makes possible a growing international consensus on the content of the rights and the corresponding responsibility of the duty-holders’ (ibid.).

In terms of specific impact on development and poverty reduction, Darrow and Tomas (2005, 485–486) identify the following five distinctive features of an HRBA: 1) ‘a solid normative basis for values and policy choices that otherwise are more readily negotiable’; 2) ‘a predictable framework for action, with the advantage of objectivity, determinacy, and the definition of appropriate legal limits’; 3) ‘a quintessentially empowering strategy for the achievement of human-centred development goals’; 4) ‘a ready legal means to secure redress for violations’; and 5) ‘a secure basis for accountability, not only for the state party concerned, but also for a significantly wider range of actors in international development cooperation’. Moreover, an HRBA encourages development policies to be more ‘preventive’ instead of ‘reactive’. Darrow and Tomas also argue that an HRBA ‘should be seen as strengthening rather than necessarily replacing good development practice’.

Urban Jonsson, one of the chief architects of UNICEF’s sustained interest in an HRBA for almost two decades, persuasively argues that one the main contributions of the approach is to draw ‘equal attention to outcome and process’ (Jonsson 2004, 4). He writes, ‘While monitoring of the achievement of human development outcomes has improved considerably during the past ten years, far less progress has been achieved in monitoring the quality of *processes* – largely because “good process” has seldom been defined’ (ibid.). Jonsson further highlights the distinction (not always clear even to those actively engaged in HRBA-related work) between human rights standards and human rights principles. Accordingly, a human rights standard ‘defines the minimum acceptable level of an outcome or result’ in contrast to human rights principles which specify ‘the criteria for an acceptable process to achieve an outcome (minimum level of conduct, values’ (ibid.). And the main principles in this context are: *universality and inalienability* (the very foundation of

human rights); *indivisibility* (all human rights are of equal worth, validity and linked); *interdependence and inter-relatedness* (no category of rights can be arbitrarily prioritised and no human rights can be fulfilled in isolation); *non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups* (explicit focus on individuals and groups suffering from and/or vulnerable to discrimination and suffering); *participation and inclusion* (including access to information, institutions and complaint mechanisms); *accountability and rule of law* (with a focus on empowerment of the poor, strengthening of oversight institutions and mechanisms for redress, etc.); *progressive realization* (certain types of economic, social and cultural rights may be realised to the maximum extent of available resources); and *non-retrogression* (no human right should suffer an absolute decline in realization).¹

Finally, Darrow and Tomas remind us that there is a two-fold purpose and value in integrating human rights principles in development (Darrow and Tomas 2005, 501). First, applying human rights principles is valuable in that their application will increase the potential of enjoying human rights in the development process. Second, human rights principles provide ‘clear and effective’ guidance to those implementing development. In short, an HRBA is a ‘framework for understanding and managing the negative impacts of discrimination and disempowerment, not a one-dimensional and static formula’ (ibid.).

OPERATIONALISATION FROM GLOBAL THEORY TO NATIONAL PRACTICE

Following a renewed interest in the UN on the Right to Development around 2002, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) encouraged analytical work on the relations between human rights and poverty reduction. Despite considerable academic research within the fields of human rights and poverty studies respectively, it thus took a while to convincingly establish an analytical and operational link between the two. A good start was nonetheless provided by Paul Hunt, Siddiq Osmani and Manfred Nowak who helped formulate the so-called *Draft Guidelines on a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies* for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In their report from 2004, the authors note that ‘The essential idea un-

derlying the adoption of a human rights approach to poverty reduction is that policies and institutions for poverty reduction should be based explicitly on the norms and values set out in the international law of human rights.' They propose a framework 'based on universally recognised moral values and reinforced by legal obligations that States have widely and voluntarily incurred by ratifying various treaties' (OHCHR 2004). In addition, the *Draft Guidelines* demonstrate that the human rights framework is compelling in the context of poverty reduction because it has the potential to empower the poor and their organisations through the rights of participation, public insight and the right to make legal claims. In brief, the Guidelines argue that human beings must be viewed as active rights-holders in efforts to reduce poverty and the main features of a human rights approach to poverty reduction are classified under six broad sets of issues: (1) identification of the poor, (2) recognition of the relevant normative national and international human rights framework, (3) equality and non-discrimination, (4) participation and empowerment, (5) progressive realisation of human rights, and (6) monitoring and accountability.

But what is really new about the HRBA and what explains its recent popularity among many developmental agencies? In relation to traditional development theory and practice – often referred to by the human rights school as the 'basic needs approach', Jonsson (2003, 20) writes that the HRBA differs in two important ways. First, the basic needs approach does not recognise the idea of a duty bearer and hence no one has a clear-cut responsibility to meet the needs of the poor and 'rights are vulnerable to ongoing violation'. In contrast, the HRBA places emphasis on the poor having the ability to claim their rights from the duty-bearers. Importantly, the poor do not lose their rights should they be incapable of claiming them given the universal, inviolable and inalienable features of human rights. In other words, 'If no one protests the denial of a right, or if an individual fails to make use of his or her right, the fulfilment of this right will be compromised, but not lost' and this is where empowerment of the community as a whole is important, in that one can extend solidarity and help another person to claim his or her rights. The HRBA consequently emphasises the principle of equality in that community

resources must be shared equally, ensuring that access to various services is enjoyed by all. By comparison, the basic needs approach often tends to place greater emphasis on acquiring additional resources to improve the access that marginalised groups in the population have to various basic services. Thus while conventional development approaches do not necessarily recognise ‘wilful or historical marginalisation, a human rights approach aims directly at overcoming such marginalisation’ by getting more actively involved in the political discourse on such issues (*ibid.*).

Second, and as has been briefly mentioned earlier, is the focus of the HRBA on the process and not simply on the outcomes of development interventions. Jonsson terms this as a difference related to ‘motivation’ and argues that while basic needs can often be met through ‘benevolent and charitable actions’, the HRBA is based on ‘legal and moral obligations to carry out a duty that will permit a subject to enjoy her of his right’. And this implies that a duty bearer must *accept* the responsibility of taking rightful action and be motivated by a desire to promote justice, features that are negated by the basic needs approach’s emphasis on charity and benevolence (*ibid.*, 20–21).

Human rights therefore ‘contribute to human development by guaranteeing a protected space where the elite cannot monopolize development processes, policies and programmes. The human rights framework also introduces the important idea that certain actors have duties to facilitate and foster development’ (OHCHR 2006). But most importantly, linking human rights to development actually forces development practitioners to confront the tough questions of their work: matters of power and politics, exclusion and discrimination, structure and policy (Uvin 2004).

Bilateral donors have largely embraced the HRBA, albeit with diverse intensities and perspectives, and we have witnessed the creation of specific departments or officers in DFID, SIDA and NORAD, among others, promoting rights-based approaches. And while many NGOs (e.g. OXFAM, CARE, Save the Children) and critics of mainstream development theories and practices defend rights-based approaches as an alternative paradigm to address poverty directly, more conservative actors (e.g. USAID, and perhaps even the UNDP) tend to link concern for rights with agendas related to good governance and democratisation – treating rights in sole-

ly instrumental terms, as means towards more effective poverty reduction strategies. The same applies to a large extent to the World Bank, which has generally struggled to conceptualise rights in relation to mainstream approaches and views currently in vogue, such as the recent focus on the concept of ‘empowerment’; and has (for example in a recent World Development Report) accorded a rather limited role to human rights. Some fear that the current emphasis on anti-corruption highlighted by the Bank may lead to still more instrumentalised and narrow views of rights, with little direct relevance for the eradication of poverty.

An HRBA as an operational tool has in practice been used in four main ways (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall 2004). First, they are used as a set of normative tools by organisations like Britain’s DFID, Sweden’s SIDA and the international NGOs Action Aid and CARE in their developmental work which emphasise solidarity with poor and marginalized groups. Second, an HRBA is used as a set of instruments which help guide assessments and based on which checklists and indicators are developed that in turn are useful in assessing the quality and effectiveness of development programmes. UNICEF, in particular, has used this approach rather successfully. Third, HRBA principles are integrated into programming and good examples of this are UNICEF’s efforts in integrating human rights into its Community Capacity Development Approach and CARE’s Household Livelihood Security Approach. Finally, the consolidation and strengthening of existing programmes are undertaken using an HRBA. Notable examples here are the UNDP’s attempts at creating and strengthening governance issues related to accountability and Action Aid’s programmes aimed at helping organisations representing the poor to develop so-called advocacy skills (*ibid.*).

In 2003, various UN agencies (with UNDP and UNICEF at the forefront) agreed on a ‘Common Understanding’ in order to coordinate the work of various UN agencies in relation to an HRBA. The agreement consisted of three main principles. First, ‘All programmes of development cooperation, policies and technical assistance should further the realization of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.’ Second, ‘Human rights standards contained in, and principles derived from, the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments guide all development cooperation and programming in all sectors and in all phases of the programming process'. Third, 'Development cooperation contributes to the development of the capacities of "duty bearers" to meet their obligations and of "rights-holders" to claim their rights' (OHCHR 2006, 35). While reflecting on the impact of the above 'Common Understanding' for purposes of programming, Jonsson concludes that 'each of the three conditions is necessary, but not sufficient in isolation'. Indeed, for him, sufficiency would require that 'all three conditions are met at the same time' (Jonsson 2004, 7–8).

The extent to which rights, and the interdependencies among them, are operationalised varies – from general statements formulated by the UN or donor agencies, to country strategies, and concrete programmes for poverty reduction. And the interconnectedness between human rights and poverty is expressed in differing, interrelated and sometimes inconsistent claims for example: a) Poverty is a denial of human rights, and hence the fulfilment of human rights will alleviate poverty; b) Human rights violations are a cause of poverty; c) Poverty is a violation of human rights; d) The HRBA is an effective tool for poverty reduction. Indeed, despite the increasing popularity of the HRBA, the authors of the *Draft Guidelines* nonetheless caution that there remain substantial challenges ahead in harnessing the potential of the human rights-based approach to poverty reduction. They propose, therefore, a global movement to speedily adopt poverty reduction strategies underpinned by human rights, thus making the abolition of poverty a matter of legal obligation. This would consequently require a broadening of the poverty reduction agenda in order to 'address the structures of discrimination that generate and sustain poverty' which would in turn necessitate the creation and strengthening of socio-political institutions capable of holding policy-makers accountable for their actions' (OHCHR 2004).

A CRITIQUE OF HRBA

Although some UN agencies – most notably UNICEF – have arrived at their own understanding of employing an HRBA in programming (of-

ten referred to as HRBAP), an excessive amount of attention on HRBA is currently directed at the rhetorical level rather than on the practical implementation of development policies (Eide 2006). As de Gaay Fortmann puts it, ‘the basic weakness of human rights is that they are mainly proclaimed rather than implemented.’² Indeed, in spite of its theoretical underpinnings, an HRBA has proved difficult to operationalise in practice. Not only have public administrations in poor developing countries been poorly prepared to implement an HRBA – particularly when one considers issues of power, conflict, exclusion and discrimination – but there has also been the absence of support from national and local political leaders to initiate such drastic changes in development thinking.

The traditional blindness of development policy towards questions related to power, conflict, exclusion and discrimination leave development bureaucracies and experts poorly prepared to implement a rights-based approach to development and poverty reduction. Another important hindrance is the lack of common concerns between human rights activists and organisations and development practitioners at the country level (Uvin 2004). Concerns for poverty and concerns for rights violations tend to be seen as separate issues, and even though the current focus on the promotion of democracy, good governance and anti-corruption has opened up some channels to reconnect rights with development practice, there is a risk that poverty will take second place to other more pressing concerns of powerful players (such as terrorism). The importance attached to human rights in key policy documents related to development, and in particular those addressing poverty, varies significantly depending on the ideological or organisational culture of the institution: ranging from human rights being viewed as central and of intrinsic value, to merely instrumental means to other ends. And Uvin (2007, 603) argues that ‘The risk always exists that taking up a rights-based approach amounts to little more than making nice statements of intent regarding things that it would be nice to achieve, or duties we would like the world to assume one day, without setting out either the concrete procedures for actually achieving those rights or methods of avoiding the slow and dirty enterprise of politics.’

Another set of criticisms relate to the HRBA's lack of conceptual rigour. As Darrow and Tomas (2005, 537) observe, 'continued credibility of rights-based approaches demands a higher degree of conceptual rigor and clarity than has prevailed in the past, along with a frank appraisal of their relative strengths and limitations'.³ Similarly, Alston (2005, 802) argues that HRBA criteria are much too often 'expressed at a level of abstraction and generality that is not uncharacteristic of some human rights discourse but that is likely to seem abstract, untargeted, and untested to the community of development economists'. He goes on to write that 'For all their conceptual sophistication and undoubted importance, these frameworks and checklists appear to the latter to offer little guidance in concrete situations and to gloss over many of the complexities of real world decision making and trade-offs'. Alston further criticises documents such as the UN Common Understanding Statement which 'do little more than restate the fundamental dilemma and do not actually offer a lot of guidance as to how to resolve it' (ibid. 803). In general, advocates of conventional (basic-needs based) development question to what extent approaches such as the HRBA really 're-invent' development, as its proponents often claim. It is hence claimed that supporters of the HRBA often underestimate the complexity of the processes and methods of development. Moreover, some claim that the major problem is the lack of communication between human rights people on the one hand and supporters of the basic-needs approach on the other.

Related to the above is the claim that the HRBA suffers from conceptual clarity at national and local levels, particularly at programmatic levels where anti-poverty policy is actually implemented. The main difficulty here is the lack of awareness among policymakers regarding what human rights principles actually entail and excuses are frequently made with reference to lack of available financial resources. For example, and according to a UNICEF official, the reluctance to embrace human rights approaches are often made by national partners or certain religious groups based on financial resources, cultural practices and misconceptions of the term 'human rights'. There is therefore an urgent need for formal and informal dialogue and negotiations coupled with lobbying, networking and flexibility in trying to promote the HRBA which will in

turn help in strengthening the conceptual clarity and understanding of the approach.⁴

While the human rights framework operates with national governments as the principal duty bearers, the HRBA also appears unclear on the exact nature of duties and obligations of national governments which are necessary to fulfil, protect and promote human rights. According to Alston (2005):

Sorting out the roles of the government, the private sector, the individual right-holders, and the international community will rarely be a routine accounting matter that can be done with ease in the context of complex development strategies. Such an approach might well be viable and helpful at a micro-level but seems less likely to be so in terms of national level planning of macro-economic policies. (Alston 2005, 803)

Moreover, the HRBA framework provides for the poor being entitled, through a participatory approach, to the ‘most effective’ poverty reduction strategies available (Osmani 2000). This can be particularly problematic as there are no indicators to assess, evaluate and test the contents of such strategies and the methods by which they are realised. What types of poverty should one be concerned with and what types of rights? Do some forms of poverty and particular rights receive greater prominence than others? Whose rights? What does it mean to be a right-holder and duty-bearer? Indeed, in several developing countries, politicians and bureaucrats argue that the HRBA has been forcibly imposed on their countries rather than being formulated on the basis of local knowledge and national discourses and processes. For example, a prominent Indian politician distinguishes between HRBA to public policy and an HRBA to development co-operation, and argues that if public policy is to succeed, initiatives must come from within the country at local, regional and national levels. Thus an HRBA can be particularly problematic when it assumes that ‘good governance is the only missing link between national poverty reduction intentions and actual poverty reduction.’⁵ It is also notable that the African Union has its own interpretation of human rights, attaching more importance

to collective notions of the person and challenging the main tenets of UNICEF's rights of the children.

In brief, the link between human rights and poverty reduction requires further elaboration and there is a need to question the historical roots of the current linkages between human rights and poverty together with the relative importance of local norms, practices and values. Are national elites convinced about the usefulness of the approach or do they feel pressurised by donors and international agencies into accepting it? To what extent do government ministries cooperate and interact in implementing the HRBA to poverty reduction? Thus there is an urgent need to examine the conditions under which the poor exercise their right to hold authorities accountable (through legal and political institutions) for ineffective attempts to promote food and nutrition security.

The challenge, as Mary Robinson puts it, is to make 'the language and approach of human rights accessible to wider audiences' and 'problems of precision in how human rights standards can be applied in different policy making situations remain'. And while 'the work continues and is deepening ... there is still a long way to go' (Robinson 2004, 868). Indeed, Banik, St Clair and McNeill (2006) argue that, a human rights-based approach to development and poverty reduction may not live up to expectations unless three sets of interrelated issues are addressed. First, there is a danger that in the process of 'operationalisation' – from global theory to national practice – much of the substance of the HRBA will be lost; and global issues that impinge substantially on poverty, such as trade, capital flows and migration, will be omitted from the agenda. Second, issues related to international accountability (donors, multilateral institutions and international organisations), unfair transnational practices, and unequal power relations that negatively affect the poor – both intra and internationally – may remain unaddressed. Finally, there is the danger that the HRBA, like other approaches before it, will be drained of political power and prove to be difficult to implement at the national and local levels.

In the remainder of the essay, I will concentrate primarily on this third aspect, i.e. the challenges associated with implementing the HRBA at the national and local levels. The traditional blindness of development pol-

icy towards questions related to power, conflict, exclusion and discrimination leave development bureaucracies and experts poorly prepared to implement an HRBA. Another important hindrance is the apparent lack of common concerns between human rights activists and organisations and development practitioners at the country level (Uvin 2004). As a result, the continuation of poverty and violations of rights are often seen as separate issues, and although the current focus on promoting democracy, good governance and anticorruption has opened up some channels to reconnect rights with development practice, there is a risk that poverty will take second place to other more pressing concerns of powerful players, such as terrorism (Banik, St. Clair and McNeill 2006). In short, although ‘a human rights-based development is desirable and possible ... doubts persist whether it is probable’ (Eide 2006, 253). Hence we need to some empirical evidence regarding how such ideas are being received at national and local levels.

POVERTY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN MALAWI⁶

Despite being home to large groups of people living in extreme poverty – and faced with immense challenges related to food insecurity, environmental degradation, unemployment and HIV/AIDS – Malawi has enjoyed relative political stability in recent years and has attempted to implement several programmes targeted at the poorest of the poor, albeit with limited success. There is also a considerable amount of ‘rights-based talk’ in the country, mainly due to the large and influential presence of UN organisations, international NGOs and bilateral foreign donors. Indeed, the dependence of Malawi’s economy on foreign aid has also made the country a hotbed for experimenting with a human rights-based approach to development and poverty reduction. I will therefore try to outline the potential impact and implications of adopting an HRBA in a Malawian context by focusing on the following set of interrelated issues: national and local political culture and the extent of participation of the poor in the political discourse; the monitoring and review roles of parliament, the courts, the national Human Rights Commission and

civil society organisations; state capacity to formulate and implement development programmes; and finally the role of international agencies and the accountability of donors. Among the questions I will address are the following: To what extent is there a local and/or national knowledge and interest in the human rights-based approach to development? How have international organisations (including bilateral donors) supported and encouraged the authorities to adopt an HRBA in policymaking? And finally, what has been the role of legislative, judicial and oversight institutions on the one hand and media and civil society organisations on the other in monitoring, reviewing and applying HRBA-related activity in Malawi?

The introduction of multiparty elections in 1994 – after almost four decades of dictatorship – gave Malawians and donors alike new hope that democracy would be better able to tackle widespread inequalities in power and wealth. The past decade has, however, revealed and reaffirmed the dominant role played by a small group of elite politicians in national-level politics. Thus, and in relation to Amartya Sen’s argument that political freedoms play an important instrumental role in addressing pressing economic need (Sen 1994; 1999), Harri Englund (2006, 6) finds that the experience with political freedom in Malawi suggests that ‘the mere allowance of arguments and disputes to take place in public is less crucial to democracy than what those arguments are *about*’. The point here is that the idea of democracy and human rights introduced in Malawi in 1994 primarily caught the imagination of elite politicians, bureaucrats and journalists together with donor representatives. The overwhelming preoccupation with political freedoms failed, however, to mobilise the large majority of rural poor, and ‘[f]or all the evocations of participation and empowerment in the rhetoric of freedom, the rural and urban poor had few opportunities to participate in defining what freedom, human rights, and democracy might mean in a Malawian context’ (ibid.). While a very narrowly defined system of rights – mainly related to elections and the right to vote – resulted in some political squabbles, the power holders were successful in silencing discussions on the fulfilment of economic and social rights. Englund goes on to observe:

[a]n impression of robust democratic processes was thereby created, not least for the benefit of foreign donors, but structural inequalities were hidden behind the notion that ‘poverty alleviation’ was basically a technical issue. Empowerment, in effect, became *disempowerment* by using the notions of freedom, democracy, and human rights to confine the scope of what could be discussed. (Englund 2006, 10)

The language of personal freedom and human rights introduced progressively following multiparty elections in 1994 and sustained donor pressure, appeared to be warmly embraced by the political elite. However, large groups of the rural poor, including women who continue to face daily forms of gender-based discrimination, remain sceptical of the benefits of human rights-talk (Ulvaer 2003). For example, Ribohn (2002, 166) writes of how ‘[l]ocal reactions against human rights are based on notions of a new “culture”, associated with “Western” values’. And ‘[o]ne consequence of local human rights discourses in Malawi is that women as a category are placed in opposition to human rights. Both men and women argue that women should maintain “culture”’ (ibid., 167). Indeed it is common to hear villagers – and even some highly educated Malawians – argue that maintaining traditional culture is of paramount consideration, even if this means overriding universalistic human rights. And villagers increasingly speak of ‘stability’, which they believe is at risk upon the introduction of human rights language: ‘Official statements stressing the importance of changing women’s role in society increase the fear of instability and uncertainty (ibid., 176). Hence, ‘the emphasis on “traditional culture” and its consequences may be seen as a reaction against transnational policies embraced by the government’ (ibid., 177).

HUMAN RIGHTS INTEGRATION IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS 2002) as well as the current Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS 2006) both mention human rights although only the former explicitly mentions elements of an HRBA. The MPRS for example, notes that human rights are ‘an essential part of democracy and are fundamental to poverty reduction’ and that ‘Declarations of human rights are intended to protect the poor

from mistreatment by more powerful individuals and organisations such as Government, and guarantee access of the poor to basic services' (MPRS 2002, 85). It goes on to observe that although the overall human rights situation in the country has gradually improved since independence in 1994 – with constitutional guarantees on economic and social rights, the government's ratification of major human rights instruments and the increasing 'watchdog' functions performed by civil society organizations – 'there is still limited observance and enforcement of human rights provisions' in the country. And the document highlights that 'Issues of human rights have not yet taken centre stage because of conflicts between customary practices and the bill of rights, low level of professional skills in human rights organisations and inadequate systems to monitor human rights violations'. The document goes on to highlight that most human rights institutions in the country 'do not have clear roles and do not use their limited resources effectively' and 'in order to address these problems, the capacities of the many human rights organisations will be developed by Government and its development partners' (ibid.). In this task, the MRSP mentions further strategic priorities that include an increase in funding of well-functioning and 'effective' human rights organisations, recruitment and training of personnel, particularly civil servants in enforcement agencies, on human rights issues. A final priority in this field is also efforts to 'raise the awareness of citizens about their constitutional rights and obligations' (ibid.).

In 2006, the MPRS was merged with the Malawi Economic Growth Strategy (MEGS) to form the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) – a more comprehensive blueprint for the country's development grouped around five broad themes – sustainable economic growth, social protection, social development, infrastructure development and improving governance. While several sections of the document made references to human rights, the term was explicitly made a sub-part under the governance theme:

The MGDS recognises the importance of human rights within the context of good governance and democracy. A rights based approach to development is the basis of equality and equity, both in the distribution

of development gains and in the level of participation in the development process. Human rights are an integral part of the overall national development agenda ... The key areas of concern in human rights awareness are the rights of vulnerable groups and how to exercise them, and roles of governance institutions in promotion and protection of human rights. Empowering the most vulnerable groups that form the larger part of the population can effectively contribute to social, economic and political development of the country. In this regard the MGDS will therefore also focus on public awareness of human rights and acknowledgement of human rights responsibilities. (MGDS 2006, 67)

Accordingly, the long-term goal was to increase awareness regarding the 'upholding' of human rights among Malawians while the 'medium-term expected outcome' entailed enhancing 'awareness and practice of human rights and responsibilities'. Although no details were provided over the specific nature of these rights, both goals explicitly mentioned the 'most vulnerable groups'. The document, however, does not make clear how such groups are to be identified and who typically fall under this category. And even when certain key strategies to promote human rights are forwarded – including 'effective prosecution of human rights violation', 'instituting human rights regulations in workplaces', 'instituting effective monitoring and evaluation of human rights issues', 'ensuring that economic, social and cultural rights, and the rights of vulnerable groups, receive adequate attention (MGDS 2006, 68; 104) – they appear to be mainly general formulations without any operational content. On the positive side, the MGDS does propose a handful of concrete measures to improve access to justice and rule of law by for example mentioning that customary laws and practices should be acknowledged by the judiciary only when these do not conflict with human rights principles (ibid., 103).

In terms of content, the MGDS did not differ substantially from the MPRS even though mention of economic, social and cultural rights was much more explicit (though hidden in a table or two towards the end of a very long document) than was the case in previous government documents. And the general impression is that the document is largely based on an understanding of human rights as civil and political rights.

And despite perennial problems of hunger and food insecurity, a ‘right to food’ is conspicuous by its absence.

In terms of implementation of development programmes – and with assistance from multilateral institutions and bilateral donor agencies, the civil service in Malawi has achieved a certain degree of professionalism, particularly at the highest echelons of government with the recruitment of several competent officers at the principal secretary level. The lack of institutional capacity required for the successful implementation of anti-poverty programmes is, however, particularly absent at the middle and lower ranks of the civil service. The low level of salaries, absence of proper facilities and the country’s patronage-oriented political system are some of the reasons behind this predicament. As Booth et al. argue, politicians have undermined civil servants’ capacity to formulate and implement development policy by refusing to delegate power for fear of losing their ability to ‘use policies for short-term political gain or patronage’ (Booth et al. 2006, ix). In addition, there has been a slow but steady erosion of civil service ethics and a steady increase in corruption levels. In recent years, opposition parties in parliament have also accused the government of distributing development funds unequally between the three major regions of Malawi – the southern region has traditionally received greater allocations than the comparatively poorer northern region.

Blessings Chinsinga (2002, 42) argues that while much has been achieved at the national policy level in terms of a Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), the impact of policy implementation at the village level has been negligible and most often ‘accidental’. This, he argues, is primarily due to the lack of information sharing between national and local levels, and the weak system of communication which leaves villages isolated from the centres of power. Large groups of rural Malawians have little or no access to newspapers, televisions and radio sets, with access to the relatively small national media largely limited to the urban centres of Lilongwe, Zomba and Blantyre. Moreover, journalists seldom undertake investigative reporting, relying mainly on ‘telephone briefings, press conferences called by officials and similarly formal exercises’ (Chirwa et al. 2003, 99). Indeed, a journalist in one of the largest newspapers in the country went on to note that there were no regular and institutionalised

interactions between the President and the media. A formal press conference is usually held at the airport when the President leaves the country and at the State House upon his return from a trip abroad.

JUDICIAL (IN)ACTIVISM

Despite this drawback, Malawi drafted and put into force a constitution which draws considerable inspiration from human rights principles. Thus Chapter IV of the constitution is dedicated entirely to human rights. Of particular importance is Section 30, which provides for a 'right to development' whereby '[a]ll persons and peoples' can enjoy 'economic, social, cultural and political development, and women children and the disabled in particular shall be given special consideration in the application of this right' (Para. 1). Accordingly, the state is required to 'take all necessary measures' including 'equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, shelter, employment and infrastructure' (Para. 2). The state is further required to 'introduce reforms aimed at eradicating social injustices and inequalities' (Para. 3).⁷ Despite such constitutional guarantees in the area of social and economic rights, some argue that low levels of economic growth combined with high levels of unemployment, frequent food shortages and recurrent natural disasters have, however, slowed down the process of realisation of these rights.

Since 1994, the courts have been active and innovative in several respects – including the positive manner in which the Bill of Rights was interpreted in relation to prisoners' rights, etc. However, the major focus of the judiciary has been on civil and political rights. While litigation on economic, social and cultural rights has been scarce, a senior official in the Ministry of Justice claimed that it has nonetheless had a positive impact in relation to issues of employment (e.g. daily wages and price-setting mechanisms by employers) and campaigns demanding the right to education. After the introduction of the 1994 Constitution, the legal profession in Malawi has also been increasingly exposed to international human rights law. The courts have, however, not given such law much prominence in their rulings largely due to the lack of training of judges and lawyers in international human rights terminology and use. Hansen

(2002, 40), for example, notes that several judges feel uncomfortable applying international human rights law since they have difficulty applying international provisions to suit domestic realities. Interviews with several judges of the Supreme Court revealed that most judges on the bench did not believe that economic and social rights are justiciable. Indeed, there was great reluctance to encourage litigation on such rights as food and housing. In comparison, many younger judges of the High Court of Malawi, housed adjacent to the Supreme Court building in Blantyre, had a much more progressive view on the matter. Many claimed to have tried to get the Supreme Court interested in development-related issues but felt that such attempts were thwarted by ‘older and more conservative’ judges in the Supreme Court who were ‘obsessed with consolidating political rights’ and who at the same time held the view that ‘the government cannot do more to reduce poverty given resource constraints’.

Moreover, while most donors and international agencies place considerable emphasis on the strengthening of the formal judicial system, over 90 per cent of the population does not have access to formal legal structures. Indeed, it is largely the political elite and a handful of NGOs that go to court; not the poor. And in order to settle local disputes, informal systems including community-based paralegals are widely used. However, and as a local UNDP officer pointed out, most donors have thus far ignored the importance of such informal mechanisms of dispute settlement.

THE PERFORMANCE OF OVERSIGHT INSTITUTIONS

Since 1994, successive governments in Malawi have supported the creation of institutions of oversight such as the Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Auditor General, the Anti-Corruption Bureau, etc. However, the independence of such institutions from executive control is highly suspect. Interviews with lawyers and officers of the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) in Lilongwe suggested that the institutions of oversight appear to enjoy ‘pseudo-independence’. For example, although the MHRC has a Constitutional mandate, the executive (primarily the all-powerful President) exercises substantial influence over its workings, having a major say in

the appointment of Commissioners and in the disbursement (or withholding) of funds. A lawyer put things in perspective when he observed, 'You cannot bite the hand that feeds you'. However, a senior official put forward a different reason for the Commission's lack of policy influence, arguing that, 'even within the MHRC, our understanding of human rights provisions is weak ... and this prevents us from being able to examine all pieces of legislation passed by Parliament ... We do not have enough lawyers; poor salaries prevent us from attracting good lawyers'. He went on to add that 'most human rights campaigns so far have been on civil and political rights ... And since we did not do a good job of influencing the government's recent MGDS document, the future of socio-economic rights looks very bleak indeed'. Another Commissioner argued that the main function of the MHRC was to promote awareness not just among the poor regarding their rights, but also awareness among members of the judiciary, several of whom lacked an understanding of international human rights law and the corresponding obligations of the Government of Malawi.

A large number of people interviewed – representing various groups including ruling party members, civil servants and human rights commissioners – seemed to agree that the Malawian Parliament was to blame for the lack of better integration between human rights and development. For example, the Law Commissioner claimed that processing laws in Parliament remained a major challenge, and that there was a need to 'sensitize MPs by facilitating the discussions in the legal affairs committee', which has been largely inactive. He highlighted nonetheless that workshops and training programmes had resulted in some success in that MPs recently showed an eagerness to pass the domestic violence act and legislation on money laundering. And although Parliament showed little interest in economic and social rights, the Law Commissioner felt that this was not really a challenge for political institutions. Rather, it was the role of NGOs, he argued, to 'make enough noise' on these issues. Similarly, a senior official of the Human Rights Commission was frustrated over the manner in which the Commission's reports on child rape, police brutality and violence against women were handled in Parliament. He accused MPs of neither reading nor debating issues outlined in the

detailed reports submitted to Parliament, and claimed that some MPs believe the MHRC to be an NGO.

Indeed, the general impression was that the Parliament lacks teeth, as was clearly borne out in the December 2006–January 2007 stand-off between President Mutharika and elected MPs on where and when the Parliament should convene. In this connection, Booth et al. argue that the weak institutionalisation of political parties in the country have allowed successive presidents to manipulate the role and functions of parliament (Booth et al. 2006, 15). Moreover, most NGOs and foreign donors are of the view that MPs seldom visit their constituencies and tend to switch party loyalties while Parliament is in session. Similarly, a senior civil servant argued that Parliament exists as a forum for the exhibition of a political majority and ‘citizens are constantly made aware that any enjoyment of socio-economic benefits is closely tied to political affiliation ... There is no automatic right; it does not exist independently but is something that is assigned based on political support ... And rights are preached, but not implemented’. A combination of the above factors has therefore undermined the legitimacy and role of the legislature in the eyes of the small minority of politically emancipated citizens. A journalist summed up the situation when he observed, ‘the importance of an institution can be gauged by the size of its headquarters; our Parliament does not even have a building of its own ... occasionally parliamentary sessions are held at the State House depending on the personal whim of the President’.

Most human rights organisations in Malawi have been historically weak, and have generally failed to create vertical linkages with local organisations. Rather, it was widely argued in Lilongwe that human rights NGOs have, in the past decade or so, spent far too much time in trying to link their existence and activities with international human rights organisations like Amnesty and Human Rights Watch. While this has provided some of these Malawian organisations with a certain level of international visibility, this has been at the cost of domestic visibility. Indeed, it was argued that the presence of civil society organisations working on human rights-related issues was virtually negligible at the grassroots level. Senior civil servants pointed to the ‘cut-throat competition’ in the civil society sector and questioned the quality of the work

carried out by NGOs claiming to work on human rights issues. The principal secretary of an influential ministry further accused most NGOs of engaging in a ‘mad rush to please donors by promising them the moon in lieu of funds’.

A representative of a major donor organisation complained that the real problem with civil society organisations in the country was related to their ‘self-regulating mechanism of self-censorship’, which prevented them from being brave enough to mount a real and sustained challenge to governmental misdeeds for fear of reprisals. Another interesting view on the role of civil society is forwarded by Englund, who writes that most NGOs in Malawi ‘tacitly support the state not “from below” but as agencies with capacities that are equal, if not superior, to those of the state’ (Englund 2006, 8). As a result, many question the adversarial functions of civil society organisations in Malawi. And according to one academic, there is no clear line of demarcation between the state, private sector and civil society organisations. Preferring the ‘convenience of life’ – including opportunities to earn an additional income and not to be harassed by the police – people appear to move effortlessly between these spheres. Hence ‘there is no one to rattle the status quo’ and ‘If you rock the boat, you may without a job *and* be humiliated in front of your family, neighbours and colleagues’. Indeed, most genuine human rights talk in Malawi is still perceived as anti-government and this creates numerous difficulties in holding the authorities to account.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS AND THE ROLE OF DONORS

Despite Malawi’s large-scale dependency on foreign aid, a common complaint among politicians and administrators related to their interactions with donor representatives in designing and implementing development policy. For example, some were concerned with the trend whereby donors tended to ‘lecture the government on various issues without understanding properly what the government says and believes in’. As Piron argues, ‘power relations between recipient governments and donor agencies are highly unequal’ and characterised by ‘a lack of transparency with regards to how aid agencies allocate financial resources, set priorities,

and assess performance' (Piron 2005). This is particularly true in the Malawian case. Moreover, several national-level politicians pointed to the fact that effective accountability mechanisms are totally absent in the international aid industry and donors and multilateral institutions are seldom held accountable by individuals and communities in countries where they provide assistance. And there is seldom much information available to national governments regarding the measures undertaken by aid agencies to stand accountable for failed projects and negative impacts resulting from an intervention. Further, representatives of some prominent NGOs in Malawi claimed that there is no consistent commitment on the part of donors and the government to operationalise and apply an HRBA. In fact, they argued that there was hardly any interaction between the two sides on the issue of linking human rights with development. Some of the 'new' donors like Taiwan (which has become a close ally after Malawi's refusal to accept Chinese aid) were accused of continuing to be obsessed with handouts, charitable acts, which in essence go against the principles of a human rights approach.

A senior UN official appeared to take some self-criticism when he observed that linking human rights and development in countries like Malawi has not achieved the desired results as most donors 'begin at the wrong end of the development aid spectrum.' Accordingly, organisations like UNDP and UNICEF target formal duty-bearers – through financial allocations to institutions such as the Human Rights Commission, Parliament and the Ombudsman – without providing adequate support to right-holders. Consequently, there is a 'demand failure' in that the poor in Malawi do not have the ability to claim their rights – particularly in respect to the right to food and housing – as effectively as some of their counterparts have done in South Africa and India.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The human rights framework operates with national governments as the principal duty bearers. Even if we accept that the primary responsibility for poverty reduction rests with the state, there are a large number of non-state actors and organisations – with their own agendas and levels

of power and influence – who both participate in and influence the formulation and implementation of public policy. In addition, the poor are a heterogeneous group and there are differences in terms of ethnicity, linguistic ties, political loyalties, etc. These give rise to several relevant and interrelated questions: How does the state actually target the poor? How do cultural practices, shared norms, the role of kinship or the extended family, etc. clash with the often individualistic approach of a human rights-based approach? Does this in turn generate local forms of resistance? What is the nature of the relationship between donors/UN agencies and the political-administrative elite of the country in linking human rights and poverty reduction? It is thus important to examine state capacity to successfully implement a human rights-based approach to development and poverty reduction and the interaction of various non-state actors (including local elites and the media) that influence this process. Similarly, it is important to understand the conditions under which the poor exercise their right to hold authorities accountable (through legal, political and informal institutions) for unsuccessful developmental interventions.

In many developing countries, including Malawi, politicians and bureaucrats argue that the human rights-based approach has been forcibly imposed on their countries rather than being formulated on the basis of local knowledge and national discourses and processes. Therefore the link between human rights and poverty reduction requires further elaboration and there is a need to question the historical roots of the current linkages between human rights and poverty together with the relative importance of local norms, practices and values. Are national elites convinced about the usefulness of the approach or do they feel pressurised by donors and international agencies into accepting it? To what extent do government ministries cooperate and interact in implementing human rights-based approaches?

The HRBA moreover requires better conceptual clarity at national and local levels; indeed, greater efforts are needed at the programmatic level and in the identification and awareness of what it means to be a right-holder and a duty-bearer and how one can effectively claim one's rights and carry out one's duties. This also means considering the realistic abil-

ity of the poor and their representatives or supporters to hold international agents to account for failing to respect, protect and fulfil human rights principles in the development process. There is also an urgent need for a systematic attempt to connect an HRBA to other accepted approaches, to learn and understand the language and the concepts of 'others'. This in order to bridge not only the gap between human rights advocates and conventional development practitioners but also in the quest to understand local demands and frustrations. In terms of the Malawi case, I agree with Harri Englund's (2006, 11) assertion that the notion of human rights has acquired very little legitimacy among the poor as 'human rights activists and volunteers, compensating for their personal frustrations over education and employment, engaged in practices and discourses that virtually mimicked the elitism of the political class'.

I believe that if the human rights approach is to make a substantial impact on poverty reduction, we must pay immediate attention to the following four sets of interrelated issues: First, it is important to examine how, when and why do global and national policies incorporate elements of HRBA? Specifically, how can the right to food be more forcefully incorporated in the national discourse on human rights? Second, we need to understand better the identities of, and motivation behind, the political, economic and social actors involved in demanding/resisting the implementation of the right to food as part of the legal and policy landscape in developing countries. How do they employ the HRBA in their actions to achieve food and nutrition security and what reactions does this produce? Third, and related to the previous point, is the strategies available to the poor that enable them to demand political accountability and recur to the legal system to see their rights enforced. And finally, we must better understand both the limits and the importance of the legal system in influencing policy design and action related to poverty. In other words, what is the nature of legal, including judicial, and administrative activity in the areas of anti-poverty policy?

There has been, in recent years, an increased interest in studying the relationship between poverty and human rights and a growing number of scholars with diverse disciplinary backgrounds are studying the added value of pursuing this approach. This is an encouraging trend, particu-

larly since without critical interrogation; countries and multilateral agencies are only too pleased to recite the virtues of human rights without a concerted attempt at applying such principles. Indeed, most developing countries are hesitant to criticise another for fear of the same criticism being thrown back at them. And bilateral donors have repeatedly placed emphasis on the protection and promotion of civil and political rights while economic, social and cultural rights have been neglected. Multilateral agencies have their own agenda and generally want to promote a particular conceptual approach pioneered by the institution in question. Thus the World Bank prefers to talk about ‘justice for the poor’ and the UNDP has placed a lot of faith in ‘legal empowerment of the poor’. The result has been that – apart from one or two agencies such as the UNICEF and UNDP – it is unclear as to who is really pushing the agenda for the closer integration between human rights and development. What remains particularly worrying is the rhetorical appeal of the human rights language which leads many to question the true contribution and impact of human rights in development.

THE BATTLEGROUND

It is now increasingly apparent that climate change is among the greatest challenges of our time and will have a substantial impact on future activities related to a whole range of dimensions including economic, health and safety, food production and security. Since the 1980s, climate change has largely been understood as the result of the so-called ‘greenhouse effect’, which in essence means that while gases such as carbon dioxide and methane allow light from the Sun to reach the earth, the very same gases also prevent some of the heat produced on earth from being radiated back into space. This feature has regulated the conditions on earth which in turn has allowed life to exist. However, with increased industrial activity, large amounts of gases such as carbon dioxide are being emitted and this has accelerated the warming process on earth. Consequently, the damages from climate change will increase as the world gets warmer. The visible signs are not only increasing average temperatures all over the world, but also melting glaciers and ice sheets in the Arctic Circle and in Antarctica. And such global heating has serious consequences for virtually all forms on life in that with ever-increasing temperatures, access to food (with declining crop yields) and water will be adversely affected. Moreover, this will lead to extensive damage to, and irreversible changes in, major ecosystems, rising sea levels and increased frequency of extreme weather events such as storms, forest fires, droughts, floods and heat waves (Stern Review 2006; IPCC 2007). Further, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) warns that, ‘The potential for runaway greenhouse warming is real and

has never been more present'. It further adds that 'The most dangerous climate changes may still be avoided if we transform our hydrocarbon based energy systems and if we initiate rational and adequately financed adaptation programmes to forestall disasters and migrations at unprecedented scales'.¹ Hence, the message here is that the tools that are available must be applied while newer tools are being developed.

However, not all are convinced by such arguments that warn of the nature, scale and danger of global warming. Indeed, new challenges and concerns have surfaced and some of the recent debate has been characterised on the one hand by doomsday prophets warning of impending catastrophe, and on the other by those who grudgingly accept that environmental concerns are a challenge but not as serious as they are often portrayed to be, since our attention ought to be focused on eliminating the threat of poverty. The general consensus, however, is that climate change is a serious problem and that concrete, bold and immediate steps are required to combat global warming, be it in terms of tackling the causes of climate change with the aim of reducing or eliminating long-term risks ('mitigation' strategies) as well as adjusting our behaviour in response to changes in climate and environment ('adaptation' strategies).

I believe we are also now in the midst of an era where there appears to be considerable ambiguity over the overarching issue at hand. If climate change has become the talking point of late, hogging the limelight, what is the status of the broader agenda of the 'environment', or even 'sustainable development' that had long ago incorporated the idea of climate change? Indeed, the relationship between 'environment' and 'climate change' does not appear to be as simple as it is often thought to be. Policies undertaken to respond to climate change may have adverse impacts on the environment (e.g. planting certain types of trees and upsetting biodiversity). Over the years there has been a focus variously on pollution, biodiversity and extinction of certain species and climate change. But it is unclear how are these related and whether there is an understanding among policy makers that these issues are in fact closely related. Thus an important challenge ahead is the potential balance that we ought to strike between actions on climate change and the broader environmental agenda in general. I therefore begin this essay by provid-

ing a brief overview of the concept of sustainable development before undertaking a discussion on the evolution of the current climate change discourse. Thereafter, I examine the relationship between the environment, climate change and development, by primarily focusing on three broad sets of heated debates – the first related to disagreements over what we value or should value; second, what we know and strategies and options to realise these; and finally the mixture of guilt and responsibility and the politics of climate change. It further appears that while there is now growing consensus at the global level on the seriousness of the issue at hand, there is still a lack of appreciation of the difficulties in implementing environmentally friendly policies on the ground and the type of political commitment necessary to make substantive progress at local levels. I therefore question whether global agreements on climate change will lead to concrete results at local levels. Does it help to think globally and act locally? Thus, and in order to tackle what I believe to be the typical disconnect between the global discourse and national and local actions on climate change and sustainable development, I will in the second half of this essay discuss specifically the political and administrative challenges of implementing a regulatory policy in a developing country by using a case study from India. The conclusions of this study point to the enormous difficulty of successfully implementing policy even when there exists clear evidence of environmental benefits for the local population and in a relatively stable political and administrative context. Undertaking a similar exercise in countries with far weaker administrative capacity, and often in the context of political instability and where the environmental benefits are not that clearly established or agreed upon, appear to be far greater.

FROM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TO GLOBAL WARMING

The apparent contradiction between industrial expansion and preservation of the environment has in recent years taken centre stage in the discussion on development. The issue was epitomised in the 1990s by the term ‘sustainable development’, but in recent years, political support

for the sustainable development agenda appears to be on the decline. While ‘climate change’ and ‘global warming’ are the currently popular buzzwords, the term ‘sustainability’ has a much longer history, having originated as a result of several international conferences and commissions, starting with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. A follow-up to this conference was the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which together with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), produced the World Conservation Strategy in 1980. Three key principles of the document included a focus on maintaining ecological processes and life support systems, preserving genetic diversity (which was a precursor to the term ‘biodiversity’) and ensuring the sustainable utilisation of species and ecosystems (Cowie 2007, 397). Another similar exercise in 1980 was performed by the Brandt Commission² which, in its reports published in 1980 and 1983, focused on the problems from a developing country perspective. And in addition to mentioning the importance of integrating ‘conservation’ with ‘development’, the group mainly focused on the impact of international trade and monetary agreements (ibid., 398–399).

Despite the above-mentioned efforts, it was only with the establishment of, and subsequently reports published by, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), that the terms sustainability and sustainable development gained political traction and credibility. The WCED Report – ‘Our Common Future’ – published in 1987 (and popularly referred to as the Brundtland report since the Commission was chaired by the former prime minister of Norway) defined sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. Two key concepts contained in the definition are ‘needs’ (the essential needs of the poor) and ‘the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs’ (WCED 1987, 43).

The notion of sustainable development, as articulated in the Brundtland report, interestingly does not build on physical or biological aspects of sustainability but rather humans and human needs (Langhelle 1998;

Lafferty and Langhelle 1999). The report thus makes the case that physical sustainability ‘cannot be secured unless development policies pay attention to considerations as changes in access to resources and in the distribution of costs and benefits’ (WCED 1987, 43). In support of this argument, Ruud (2006, 139) provides a hypothetical example of a forest management programme where a group of NGOs push for a ban on logging in a rainforest area. It would be a mistake to implement such a claim without first understanding how such a ban would impinge on the lives of the local community. Hence, one must understand how a particular action is related to a wider set of goals and strategies, and the consequences of simply pursuing an environmental or ecological target without taking into consideration levels of poverty and deprivation can be particularly counterproductive. Thus ‘the question of what is physically sustainable cannot be answered without taking into account the question of distribution and what one wishes to maintain and develop’ (ibid.). Accordingly, the idea of sustainable development recognises the fact that ‘there are trade-offs between social, economic and ecological needs, and these are also related to current and future concerns’ (ibid.), but that such trade-offs must be resolved. Lafferty and Langhelle (1999) argue that sustainable development ought to be understood in relation to national and global equity (within and between generations). Accordingly, the essence of implementing a policy on sustainable development entails balancing economic concerns with those of social welfare, which in turn must be seen in relation to ecological concerns and requirements.

With sustainable development somewhat firmly established in the international development discourse, 178 countries adopted (during the Rio Conference in 1992) ‘Agenda 21’ – a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by UN organisations, governments and major groups in every area in which human life has an impact on the environment. This was subsequently discussed and revised in later international meetings (e.g. the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation in 2002). Indeed, over the years, sustainable development has been frequently used in various contexts. And as Giddens (2009, 61–62) observes, ‘The introduction of the notion has had a valuable effect. At least to some degree it has helped bring together two previously discrepant com-

munities – on the one hand, greens and others who were “anti-growth” and, on the other, pro-market authors’. Similarly, while moderating an online debate on sustainable development in July 2009, the science and technology editor of *The Economist*, Geoff Carr notes that the notion ‘carries with it the idea of restraint – of making do with less if you are fortunate enough to live in a rich country, and adopting what are euphemistically described as “appropriate technologies” if you live in a poor one. Appropriate technologies are the sort of things that will improve your life, but not by as much as adopting the full panoply of rich-world gizmos might. Their advantage is that, by definition, they make fewer demands on energy and raw materials than those rich-world gizmos do.’³ In the same debate, David Victor from Stanford University criticizes the concept, arguing that ‘Sustainable development is a beautiful-sounding idea that has become intellectually bankrupt and should be abandoned. It leads to wrongheaded thinking about the real causes of economic and environmental troubles. And it encourages governments to adopt terrible policies.’⁴ Victor claims that the main reason behind the popularity of the concept is its fuzziness, and he identifies four major reasons for this. First is the tendency among supporters of sustainable development to use ‘the concept’s ambiguity as a licence to embrace stasis and autonomy’ and consequently not place adequate emphasis on ‘radical changes in technology and behavior’. The impression given is one of a problem without a solution. Second, the focus on future generations, which gave the concept its uniqueness, has now become increasingly one-sided by focusing ‘only on harms’. As a result, and despite the damages involved in the process of extracting resources, the benefits that future generations will benefit from, particularly in relation to new technology and infrastructure investments, are largely overlooked. Third, the focus on particular types of policies, especially those that mainly advocate spending large sums of money in renewable energy, do not reflect different ground level realities and may not necessarily be the right solution. Rather, Victor argues, ‘Just because fossil fuels are finite does not mean that they should not be used, if married with clear and strong incentives to be frugal and to lighten their environmental footprint’. Victor’s final point is that despite the Brundtland Report’s emphasis on fairness, dignity and human

rights, sustainable development has currently ‘become about greenery’. Accordingly, ‘the developing world is rightly afraid that all the greenery in the North will be an excuse to ignore these many other aspects of welfare that, in the end, are what civilisation is all about’.

Another recent, and somewhat different, critique comes from the Norwegian scholar Nina Witoszek, who argues that a major flaw of the sustainable development concept has been the failure to acknowledge the relevance of cultural perspectives on sustainability. Thus culture has been sidetracked in favour of economic and scientific solutions – ‘If human beings seemed selfish, materialistic and overtly concerned with family, friends and their own property, it was only because the existing economic and political structures had made them that way’. Accordingly, she argues that the resulting ‘cultural dyslexia’ of the authors of the Brundtland Report and other supporters of the approach has not only ‘failed to inspire full-scale mobilization of the public’, but the ‘translation into action has been sluggish and half-hearted’ (Witoszek 2009, 2). Indeed, the real shortcoming in the entire sustainable development literature is good analytical work at national, regional and local levels. And while there are relatively many studies on implementing such an agenda in developed countries, very little analytical work has been undertaken about the feasibility of promoting such development in developing countries. Almost a decade ago, I was involved in a study of pollution control in India. I believe the conclusions from that study are still useful and relevant in the current debate. I will return to this in the second half of this essay. But first let us examine briefly the evolution of the climate change discourse.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSE

A series of events in the past few years has made tackling climate change a high priority in global discourses. A significant development has been the four reports (published in 1991, 1995, 2001 and 2007) by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – the scientific panel of the United Nations, with over a thousand scientists from all over the world, studying climate change. The most recent report, published in February 2007, declared that there was now ‘unequivocal’ evidence of increased global warming and that human activity was ‘very likely’ the driving

force that has contributed to this phenomenon over the past five decades. The emissions from smokestacks, tailpipes and burning forests had been the major culprits for the increase in average earth temperature by more than 1 degree Fahrenheit since 1900. By comparison, the previous report by the IPCC in 2001 has concluded that humanity had 'likely' played a role in the warming process. The addition of 'very' to 'likely' resulted in a major shift in the manner in which the problem was perceived by major world actors, including national governments, who had for long been dilly-dallying on goals to protect the environment.

For the major part of the international climate discourse, however, the focus has traditionally been on mitigation strategies. In this connection, and using Huq and Toulmin's (2006) identification of three eras of the climate change discourse, I will, in the following sections, briefly discuss the resulting change in focus on the mitigation-adaptation equation.

First, and starting in the late 1980s (and with the publication of the first assessment report of the IPCC in 1988) and lasting until around 2000, the debate on climate change mainly tended to focus on 'mitigation' features. Consequently, climate change was also understood as a 'greenhouse effect' and an 'environmental' problem that could be addressed by reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases. And the major players in this discourse were scientists and national environmental policymakers. The first major event that took place during this period was the signing by 166 nations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. By agreeing on the UNFCCC, nearly all countries of the world pledged to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases 'at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system' and in a time frame 'sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner'. It was also agreed that industrialised countries (so-called 'Annex 1 countries') were those mainly responsible for previous emissions and consequently would also be obligated to being among the first to undertake corrective action in the form of activities that include 'emissions trading' (i.e. purchasing allowances from other Annex 1 countries who are ahead of

their targets) and financially supporting Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects such as reforestation programmes and wind farms in developing countries. With the publication of the IPCC's second assessment report in 1995, it became quite clear that the pledges by countries signing the UNFCCC had not been converted into practice. And the available evidence clearly showed rapidly rising emission levels which, without a more forceful international instrument, would lead to severe global problems. In order to make the UNFCCC more effective, with binding targets for reductions in greenhouse gases, a treaty was negotiated in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan (the 'Kyoto Protocol'). The signatory countries, with notable exceptions of the United States and Australia, pledged to reduce their annual emissions of six greenhouse gases – CO₂, nitrogen oxides, methane, sulphur hexafluoride, hydrofluorocarbons and perfluorocarbons by, on average, 5.2 per cent by 2012 as compared to 1990 emission levels. The idea was that industrialised countries would reduce their emissions by a specific agreed amount by 2012 (the first commitment period), but that the targets would be revised and made more stringent in the following period. Developing countries were not required to accept any targets in the first period but it was agreed that they would do so after 2012. Given the lengthy delays in getting the document ratified by other countries, the Kyoto Protocol became international law only in February 2005. The United States' and Australia's refusal, along with the delays in other countries, to ratify the treaty, meant that the Protocol has never had the impact that it was designed to have. Thus the climate change agenda became increasingly politicised, with each industrialised country devising strategies to allow it to increase its emissions without sanctions.

The second era of the climate change debate began in 2001, and coincided with publication of the third assessment report by the IPCC, which warned of the adverse impacts of climate change not just in the distant future but in fact in the next two decades or so. It now became quite clear that mitigation alone would not suffice and that strategies of 'adaptation' were also urgently required. This era also witnessed a change in perceptions, with climate change not simply being understood as an environmental issue but also in relation to the threat it posed to efforts aimed at development and poverty reduction. As a result, a greater number of

actors became active in the global and national discourses, particularly NGOs. There was also increased focus on topics such as agriculture and water, coastal management and disaster preparedness. The most notable event during this period was the Marrakech Accords signed in 2001 whereby several funds – such as the Least Developed Country (LDC) fund and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) – were established to assist poor countries in the adaptation process.

A third era of climate change can be traced to the publication of *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* (2006), a report commissioned by the United Kingdom's Department of Treasury. The message of the report was quite clear, 'The scientific evidence is now overwhelming: climate change is a serious global threat, and it demands an urgent global response' (ibid., xv). It went on to conclude that 'Climate change will affect the basic elements of life for people around the world – access to water, food production, health, and the environment. Hundreds of millions of people could suffer hunger, water shortages and coastal flooding as the world warms' (ibid.). The report further highlighted the fact that climate change will have serious consequences of economic growth and development, particularly since the impacts of climate change will not be evenly distributed in that the poor will suffer first and most. And reversing the process of damage in poor countries may prove to be very difficult, if not impossible. However, the report simultaneously also showed that while substantial costs were needed to stabilise the climate, such actions are not only 'manageable', but that any 'delay would be dangerous and much more costly' (ibid., xvi). The message was not one where tradeoffs were required; indeed the report argued that actions on climate change will not require halting 'the aspirations for growth of rich and poor countries' and that with strong and 'deliberate' policies, several alternatives can be formulated and implemented to cut emissions of greenhouse gases (ibid., xvii). However, for this to happen, a committed international response is required 'based on a shared understanding of long-term goals and agreement on frameworks for action' (ibid., xviii). Specifically, four elements of such future frameworks were proposed: establishing a powerful global emissions trading regime; promoting cooperation and coordination within technological innovation and support for research; concerted

actions to reduce deforestation; and finally strengthening strategies for adaptation, particularly in the world's poorest countries, where climate change should be fully integrated into development policy (requiring also an increase in ODA from rich countries).

Closely following on the heels of the Stern Review was the IPCC's fourth assessment report in early 2007 which, according to many, removed any doubt over the urgency of the climate change problem and the need to act immediately to curb the emission of greenhouse gases. Concluding for the first time that global heating was 'unequivocal', the report noted that human activity was 'very likely' the cause of the rise in global temperatures since 1750, and that there was a 70 per cent increase in the emission of greenhouse gases between 1970 and 2004. It stated with 'high confidence' that, 'Observational evidence from all continents and most oceans shows that many natural systems are being affected by regional climate changes, particularly temperature increases (IPCC 2007, 31). Accordingly, the report noted that current mitigation policies are not enough and that in the near future 'Anthropogenic warming could lead to some impacts that are abrupt or irreversible, depending upon the rate and magnitude of the climate change' (ibid., 53). Nonetheless, the key message was that global warming and its harmful effects could be substantially blunted by prompt action.

Despite the attempt to involve a large number of experts from various disciplines and from various parts of the world, there were several criticisms of the report. For example, the IPCC was accused of being too conservative in estimating the rise of future sea levels and for exaggerating the impact of human activities on the climate. Others argued that there was inadequate emphasis on the effects of solar activity on the climate (CICERO 2009). Nonetheless, the impact of this latest IPCC report was quite large, particularly given the substantial coverage the issue received in the media. Further attention was provided when the IPCC and Al Gore shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.

One could perhaps say that we now find ourselves in or on the thresholds of a fourth era of climate change. The next United Nations Climate Change Conference is scheduled to be held in December 2009 in Copenhagen and the IPCC is busy preparing its fifth assessment report to

be published in 2014. But several countries have already announced new measures – including mitigation and adaptation strategies – to tackle what is increasingly being labelled as a ‘climate crisis’. Norway is a good case in point. In early 2009, the Norwegian government adopted a three-pronged development assistance policy entitled *Climate, Conflict and Capital* (GoN 2009). Accordingly, the government committed itself to supporting efforts for a new international treaty on climate change by primarily promoting the interests of the poorest countries in the world, particularly those in Africa. Interestingly, the Minister of Development was given additional charge of heading the Ministry of Environment. The resulting policy placed particular emphasis on strategically using funds earmarked for development assistance to achieve technological advancements in the energy sector (e.g. emphasis on clean energy) of developing countries. Another key area of current Norwegian priority is the government’s international climate and forest initiative launched in December 2007 in Bali which includes REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). Moreover, the government’s development policy aims at reducing the emission of greenhouse gases from forest areas in addition to promoting measures of carbon capture and protecting biodiversity. As a result of this new focus, Norway has announced the availability of substantial and earmarked funding in order to stimulate more work in these areas. However, the real impact of such initiatives will take time to assess, particularly since most current research (and funding) now seems to be focused on the climate change buzzword, and perhaps at the expense of the traditional development and environment agendas.

HEATED DISAGREEMENTS AND THE GROWING CONSENSUS

For a while now, there have been substantial disagreements on the exact level of guilt that could be assigned to human activity on the global warming issue; and the direction of the debate went more in the direction of what could be done to control the damage already done. Now suddenly climate change, global warming, pollution control and

protection of the environment are on everyone's lips. Ever since talk of greenhouse gases and its harmful effects on the earth began in the mid-19th century, scientific and general public debate on the topic have been quite heated. In the 1970s, when the emphasis was mainly on air and water pollution, the environmental movement argued its case with satellite imagery which showed evidence of pollution in the earth's atmosphere (Henson 2006, 236). Subsequently there were concerns expressed in media debates that the earth was not warming but actually 'cooling down' and some claimed that a nuclear war could produce sun-blocking particles and result in a nuclear winter. However, in the late 1970s, the debate again was one of warming and the 1980s witnessed an increase in reports on how the earth's temperature was increasing (*ibid.*, 237). Political interest in many countries was gradually ignited in the late 1980s with observed and highly visible climatic changes resulting in excessively hot summers and ensuing droughts. A concrete result of such interest was the establishment of the IPCC in 1989 and the organisation's first report in 1990 really put the topic prominently in the global political discourse.

The subsequent policy debates have essentially revolved on the one hand on what we know ('positive claims') and on the other hand on what we value or should value ('normative claims'). The resulting debate has been contentious and there has also been a focus on specific actions on how to respond to the risks posed by climate change (Dessler and Parsons 2006, 18).

WHAT WE VALUE OR SHOULD VALUE

Climate sceptics have launched numerous arguments over the years. The topic of climate change is a difficult problem for most people to understand and accept as any major effort to combat the problem will invariably affect the lives of individuals and groups in one way or the other. The typical arguments by the sceptics have included contesting the facts over whether the earth really is warming and whether such warming is due to natural variation. Some also argue that the amount of warming observed is insignificant and that there are numerous benefits of warming (e.g. particularly for agriculture and forestry). Still others argue that while global warming may be a fact, recent technological advancements will

enable the world to withstand and negate the consequences (Henson 2006, 245–249). Before focusing on areas of growing scholarly consensus, I will discuss two interesting, but extreme, viewpoints in the debate, as represented by Bjørn Lomborg and James Lovelock, respectively.

The publication of *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World* in 2001 by the Danish social scientist Bjørn Lomborg created a major storm as it claimed that although global warming was indeed fact, its size and future consequences were being unnecessarily exaggerated. The book challenges the hypothesis that environmental problems were progressively worsening and using a considerable amount of statistical material, Lomborg examines a range of issues – including life expectancy and health, food and hunger, water pollution, deforestation trends, non-energy sources and biodiversity – and claims that the solutions being advocated as a result of such pessimism were not only ‘grossly inefficient’ but would only make things worse. Instead, he argues that ‘mankind’s lot has actually improved in terms of practically every measurable indicator’, and qualified this by arguing that although things are better, they were ‘not necessarily good’ (Lomborg 2001, 4). Specifically in relation to global warming, Lomborg questions the methodology and the process by which future scenarios are predicted and claims that ‘the limitations of computer modeling, the unrealistic nature of the basic assumptions made about future technological change and political value judgements have distorted the scenarios being presented to the public’ (ibid., 259). Rather, he goes on to argue that ‘an economic analysis of the costs and benefits of an immediate reduction in CO₂ emissions clearly shows that the world as a whole would benefit more from investing in tackling problems of poverty in the developing world and in research and development of renewable energy than in policies focused on climate change’ (ibid.).

In *Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist’s Guide to Global Warming* (2007), Lomborg reiterates that global warming is ‘real’ and ‘man-made’ and will have serious effects on humans towards the end of the 21st century. But he also continues his quest to highlight the futility of ambitious programmes currently being proposed to combat global warming that are not only extremely expensive, but are also based on ‘emotional’, ‘exag-

generated' and unscientific assumptions. And the impact of such measures on reducing global warming, argues Lomborg, will be negligible. Rather than making climate change the 'primary focus', the emphasis ought to be on 'smarter solutions' such as spending 0.05 per cent of national GDPs in research and development on non-carbon emitting energy technologies (ibid., 212) in addition to combating malaria and HIV/AIDS and other related developmental problems. Such attempts, argues Lomborg, will be far less expensive and will save more lives than the current climate change programmes. Thus the message is 'Dealing with global warming will take a century and will need a political will spanning parties, continents and generations' and hence 'We need to be in for the long haul and find a cost-effective strategy, that doesn't splinter through overarching ambitions' (ibid., 220).

Having gone against the tide of what constitutes a growing consensus in the scientific community on the severity of global warming and its negative impacts, Lomborg's work – despite receiving some favourable reviews from selected academicians as well as the popular press and magazines such as *The Economist* – has been heavily criticised. From a development perspective, Lomborg does deserve some sympathy for highlighting the mad rush these days to climate-proof everything, often at the expense of strengthening efforts to promote development within health, sanitation, infrastructure and food, to name a few areas. However, most of the scientific feedback suggests that Lomborg's analysis – despite the numerous references and footnotes in his books – is not rigorous enough, that he does not critically analyse his sources of information, that he selectively quotes material that appears to support his ideas, that he does not do justice to cost-benefit analyses and misinterprets his material, and that his work is better geared towards generating media publicity than making a real contribution to the climate change debate.⁵ And the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-profit scientific advisory group, perhaps best summarised the feelings of a majority of the scientific community when it found that *The Skeptical Environmentalist* 'fits squarely in a tradition of contrarian works on the environment that may gain temporary prominence but ultimately fail to stand up to scientific scrutiny ... groups with anti-environmental agendas use these works to promote

their objectives. It is also an unfortunate, time-consuming distraction, for it pulls talented scientists away from the pressing research needed to help us understand the environmental challenges we face and their prospective solutions'.⁶ Lomborg's second book, *Cool It*, has attracted similar criticism. For example, my colleague Desmond McNeill (2009, 1) claims that Lomborg's argument – that spending money on global warming is less worthwhile than most development interventions – is largely based on the use of cost-benefit analysis which employs not only 'imaginative techniques' but also makes 'sometimes quite heroic assumptions'. And 'like any sharp instrument, cost benefit analysis can – in the wrong hands – be dangerous' and McNeill argues that Lomborg misuses the method and that the foundations of Lomborg's argument 'are so fragile that the structure simply does not stand up' (ibid., 1–2).

At the other end of the spectrum – at considerable distance from Lomborg – is James Lovelock, an independent researcher and inventor, most famous for formulating the Gaia (Greek goddess of the Earth) hypothesis (later called a theory).⁷ According to this school of thought, the earth can be viewed as a single organism (a complex system with both living and non-living parts) and the earth's environment is regulated by the biosphere which in turn makes life possible. Gaia is thus 'a type of planetary-scale, open thermodynamic system, with abundant life supported by a flux of free energy from a nearby star. The earth supports the only known example of a Gaia system. This system's environmental state has been profoundly altered by the presence of life; some of its state variables are remarkable stable; and it responds surprisingly fast to certain perturbations' (Lenton 2004, 15). Lovelock believes that human activity has started a chain of events – starting from the time humans began using fire and tools on purpose and worsening with the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century – that has adverse effects on the lives of humans on earth, and that this process is irreversible. And the explosive growth in human population on earth is only disruptive. Lovelock therefore supports the Malthusian warning of the fatal consequences such a rapid increase in population will have on the earth as well as on human well-being (for example with the growing frequency of famines resulting from a shortage of food).

In his latest book, *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning* (2009), Lovelock argues that Gaia theory differs from other theories of climate change in terms of ‘procedure, not from a different factual basis’ (ibid., 7). Most climate change models ‘do not yet include the physiological response of the ecosystems of the land or oceans’ (ibid.). Having been an early supporter of the IPCC, he now believes that the major problem with the IPCC reports, in particular the one from 2007, is that there is a major discrepancy between IPCC forecasts and ‘real world’ observations. He is particularly critical of the so-called IPCC consensus, which he believes is the result of different stakeholders (including managers and politicians) having influenced scientists to present the conclusions in a manner which gives the appearance that there is general agreement on the issue that we can turn things around by modifying our behaviour. (ibid., 7–8). Lovelock thus believes that climate change does not ‘follow the smooth path of slowly but sedately rising temperatures predicted by the IPCC, where change slowly inches up and leaves plenty of time for business as usual’. By comparison, and in the real world, changes occur ‘intermittently with spells of constancy, even slight decline, between the jumps to greater heat (ibid., 5). And the current situation is one where ‘Our tank is near empty of data and we are running on theoretical vapour: this is especially true of data about oceans that make ecosystems to climate change – and, just as importantly, the effect of change in the oceans and ecosystems on the climate, (ibid., 6).

Sending a warning of impending disaster, Lovelock claims that, ‘Even if we had time, and we do not, to change our genes to make us act with love and live lightly on the Earth, it would not work’ (ibid., 150). Consequently, he argues that the world is heading for a catastrophe given that humans are the toughest predators the earth has ever witnessed. And any talk of radically changing our activity to reversing the negative effects on the environment is absurd since changing human behaviour is like expecting ‘crocodiles or sharks to become, through some great act of will, vegetarian’. We can, at best, ‘temper our strength with decency’ (ibid.), by for example embracing an increased use of nuclear energy, which Lovelock claims to be ‘by far the most effective way to reduce the emission of carbon dioxide (ibid., 17). He further cautions that we should not be

convinced by the anti-nuclear energy propaganda churned out by those ‘whose profitability is threatened and even more from nations who see their power and influence lessened’ (ibid.).

The Gaia hypothesis has attracted a fair amount of attention among scholars and practitioners; while it has been largely embraced by the environmental movement, Lovelock’s support for nuclear energy has attracted considerable criticism from these very same groups. Scientists in general, have refused to accept the argument that the living and non-living parts of the world are related. Thus Doolittle (1981) and Dawkins (1999, 234–237) reject the idea that individual organisms can provide the feedback mechanisms that Lovelock proposes. Similarly Gould (1997) writes that Gaia is ‘a metaphor, not a mechanism’ and ‘Metaphors can be liberating and enlightening, but new scientific theories must supply new statements about causality’. Hence, ‘Gaia, to me, only seems to reformulate, in different terms, the basic conclusions long achieved by classically reductionist arguments of biogeochemical cycling theory’. Particularly problematic is Lovelock’s emphasis on the lifeboat analogy, similar to the one used by Garrett Hardin to claim that we have a moral obligation *not* to assist those dying from starvation in distant lands since this would only makes things worse for ourselves. In my own interactions with Lovelock, he forcefully argued that Gaia has priority over humans, even if such humans risk dying from starvation. But human beings are here to stay and I find it morally difficult to accept the argument that a privileged few should decide that by tending to Gaia, our own lives will be prolonged on this earth. From an ethical perspective, we must do our utmost to help those in need *now*, while at the same time trying to fathom out how we can minimise the risks from climate change and environmental degradation in the decades to come. These issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter 7 of this book, but what do we actually know from climate science?

WHAT WE KNOW: STRATEGY, IDEOLOGY AND OPTIONS

The growing consensus is closely associated with two terms that we are constantly bombarded with in the current discourse. ‘Mitigation’ entails tackling the causes of climate change, including interventions under-

taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risks and effects of climate change, particularly in relation to the emission of greenhouse gases. Thus mitigation is about moving towards low-carbon societies. Since climate change is a result of a complex web of relationships – social, economic, political, environmental – mitigation strategies and options include the following: energy supply (e.g. fuel switching from coal to gas, nuclear power, hydropower, wind, geothermal and bioenergy); transport (e.g. fuel-efficient/hybrid vehicles, biofuels, non-motorised transport); buildings (e.g. efficient lighting and daylighting, improved insulation, passive and active solar energy for heating and cooling); industry (e.g. material recycling and substitution, more efficient end-use electrical equipment); agriculture (e.g. improved crop and grazing management to increase soil carbon storage, improved rice cultivation techniques, dedicated energy crops to replace fossil fuel use); forestry (e.g. afforestation, reforestation, forest management, reduced deforestation); waste (e.g. waste incineration with energy recovery, composting of organic waste, controlled wastewater treatment) (IPCC 2007, 60). Related to these options are certain policies, measures and instruments that have proved to be environmentally effective. These include reduction of fossil fuel subsidies, increase in taxes on vehicle purchase and registration, incentives for energy companies, providing financial incentives and regulations for improved land management, efficient use of fertilisers and irrigation, financial incentives for improved waste and wastewater management and renewable energy incentives or obligations (ibid.).

The other term, ‘adaptation’, refers to adjustments in nature and/or by humans (individuals and groups) in preparation for and response to changes in climate and the environment (IPCC 2007). Thus while mitigation deals with the *causes* of climate change, adaptation deals with the *effects* of, and efforts to build resilience to, climate change. For example, in Article 4.1(f), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) refers to adaptation in the following manner: All Parties shall ‘Take climate change considerations into account, to the extent feasible, in their relevant social, economic and environmental policies and actions, and employ appropriate methods, for example impact assessments, formulated and determined nationally, with a view to minimizing

adverse effects on the economy, on public health and on the quality of the environment, of projects or measures undertaken by them to mitigate or adapt to climate change?

The IPCC (2007, 57) provides an exhaustive overview of possible adaptation strategies and options within the following selected sectors: water (e.g. expanded water harvesting, water storage and conservation techniques, water reuse, desalination, water-use and irrigation efficiency); agriculture (e.g. adjustment of planting dates and crop variety, crop relocation, improved land management through erosion control and soil protection through tree planting); infrastructure/settlement (e.g. seawalls and storm surge barriers, land acquisition and creation of marshlands/wetlands as buffers against sea level rise and flooding); human health (e.g. heat-health action plans, emergency medical services, safe water and improved sanitation), tourism (e.g. diversification of tourism attractions and revenues, shifting ski slopes to higher altitudes and glaciers, artificial snow-making); transport (re-designing standards and plans for roads, rail and other infrastructure to cope with warming and drainage); energy (e.g. underground cabling for utilities, energy efficiency, use of renewable sources, reducing dependence on single sources of energy). The underlying policy framework for such options would in turn include the formulation of national water policies and integrating water resources management, institutional reform, land tenure and land reform, standards and regulations that integrate climate change into design, recognition of climate risk in health and transport policies, and national energy policies, regulations and fiscal and financial incentives to encourage use of alternative sources (*ibid.*).

The current consensus is well captured by the 2007 IPCC report which observes that, 'Societies can respond to climate change by adapting to its impacts and by reducing GHG emissions (mitigation), thereby reducing the rate and magnitude of change'. However, it also goes on to note that while the 'capacity to adapt and mitigate is dependent on socio-economic and environmental circumstances and the availability of information and technology', there is currently 'much less information ... available about the costs and effectiveness of adaptation measures than about mitigation measures' (*ibid.*, 56). Related to this is the finding that

adaptive capacity is neither evenly distributed between countries nor within countries.

Despite the above consensus, there are numerous disagreements, even among environmentalists and climate campaigners, relating to strategy and ideology. Henson (*ibid.*, 241) classifies such debates into four broad categories. First, there are disagreements over how to deal with specific features of capitalism – with some advocating climate-healthy or ‘green commerce’ choices like driving hybrid cars and using low-energy light bulbs while others are much more sceptical to globalisation and the workings of the corporate world. Second, there are differences over the approach to fossil fuels. For example, some recognise that it is unrealistic to drastically phase out the use of fuels such as coal, oil and gas, and hence it is better to work for ‘cleaner’ fuels and so-called carbon dioxide sequestration (i.e., various techniques for mitigating global warming by long-term storage of carbon dioxide or other forms of carbon). Other groups emphasise the importance of promoting the use of renewable energy. Third, there has been a lengthy dispute over the use and benefits of nuclear energy as an alternative to fossil fuels. While campaigners such as James Lovelock have strongly advocated nuclear energy as the most viable solution available for the planet, most environmental groups are opposed to such a solution. Fourth, there are often disagreements on the choice of concrete short-term and long-term benchmarks and targets, with some advocating the stabilisation of the earth’s temperature to 2 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial temperature. Others argue that we should aim for much more ambitious targets, with radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

GUILT, RESPONSIBILITY AND THE POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Leaving academics and activists aside for a while, it is time to take a look at the politics that characterise climate change discussions and negotiations at the global level. The integral role that global politics has played, and will continue to play, in the climate change discourse really came to the forefront after the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the events that followed since it came into force in 2005. The significance of the document is related to the binding obligations on greenhouse gas

emissions for a large number of industrialised countries in the world for the period 2008–2012. Developing countries are not required to do so. Thus during the negotiations for the signing – and later during the process of ratifying – the Protocol, numerous differences were observed among industrialised countries on the one hand and between industrialised and developing countries on the other.

While the United States and Australia both signed the Kyoto pact, they did not ratify it. And although the Kyoto pact was signed by President Clinton, it was never sent to the United States Senate for approval. The new Bush administration rejected the provisions of the agreement outright. Indeed, the Clinton and Bush administrations were both increasingly wary of binding commitments and what it would do to domestic industrial production and employment. Despite having a good record at promoting the cause of the environment, Australia sensationally sided with the Americans. Indeed, Clive Hamilton in *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change* (2007) forcefully argues that the so-called ‘greenhouse mafia’ in Australia, consisting of powerful fossil-fuel lobbyists representing powerful corporations, was largely influential in determining (for almost a decade) the government’s policies and attitudes on climate change which basically opposed binding commitments on emission reductions. These lobbyists, representing powerful corporations (including coal and petroleum sectors), not only worked closely with the government of John Howard in policy matters but some of them also represented Australia in its official delegation to negotiate the Kyoto Protocol – a feature that even the Bush administration did not allow for the American delegation. Following the victory of the Labour Party in the 2007 elections, the Kyoto pact was, however, finally ratified by Australia in December of the same year mainly due to the efforts of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

The Oscar awarded to the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* and the subsequent Nobel Peace Prize award to Al Gore created global headlines and managed to place the environmental issue more prominently than before in the American political and social agenda. The United States, which has traditionally not only been the biggest polluter but also a major obstacle to combating global warming, was forced to address the

issue both domestically and in international settings. And while the Bush administration was lukewarm to major emission cuts, the Obama presidency has ushered in new hope that the United States will take a major leadership role in bringing about consensus between emerging powers like India and China and developed countries in Europe and North America. For example, even though the Obama administration has taken a radically different view on climate change – with the announcement of several promising initiatives in 2009 (e.g. the initiative to force automakers to produce cleaner cars) – there is a feeling in some European quarters that the Americans are sending conflicting messages to different audiences. Indeed, some point out that the United States currently agrees with Europeans on long-term goals of emission reductions but not with ambitious medium and short-term goals. At the same time, there is concern that the United States is pursuing parallel negotiations with countries like China that will create difficulties in agreeing on ambitious targets.⁸

The current discourse appears to be mired in controversy and doubts over the true intentions and commitments of the major actors in the fray. Indeed, the 35th G-8 summit held in July 2009 in L'Aquila (Italy) is illustrative of such mistrust when the leaders of the eight richest countries in the world – United States, Great Britain, Italy, France, Canada, Germany, Japan and Russia – in addition to the leaders of China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, got together to discuss global warming and to commit to specific goals and targets for cutting carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases by 2050. The goal was to take concrete steps towards a worldwide climate treaty planned to be signed at the UNFCCC conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. According to the proposed G-8 agreement, the goal was to reduce worldwide emissions of CO₂ gasses by 50 per cent by 2050, with industrial countries cutting their emissions by as much as 80 per cent. The draft agreement signed during this meeting, however, failed to embrace such ambitious goals. The resulting discussions epitomised the divide between developed and developing countries on this burning issue. Indeed, negotiators from seventeen leading polluters in the world abandoned mention of specific targets in the draft agreement although they did agree on a goal of preventing temperatures

from rising more than 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. The main obstacle to signing a more ambitious agreement appeared to be developing countries, particularly the so-called 'emerging powers' headed by China, India and Brazil, who simply agreed to make unspecified but 'meaningful' reductions in emissions. And the impasse over specific targets illustrated the deep divisions that exist between developed countries in Europe and North America on the one hand and emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil on the other. Such divisions make arriving at a consensus on climate change increasingly difficult.

Indeed, some of the most persuasive arguments are often made by individuals and nations who, given the uncertainty associated with climate change predictions, argue in favour of undisturbed economic growth. But there are also others, particularly developing country governments, who may recognise the adverse effects of global warming but will still insist that economic development and the reduction of poverty should take priority (at least for their own countries) and that the main onus is on developed countries who have already achieved well-being after having been responsible for the major chunk of greenhouse emissions. The developing country argument therefore has traditionally been that the richest countries in the world are responsible for most of the pollution that is currently the cause of global warming and climate change. And although developing countries are also increasing their emissions in the process of development, they argue that this is the only way in which poverty can be reduced and that it is unacceptable to them that developed countries should dictate what pattern of economic growth poor countries should pursue. Another important aspect of the developing country viewpoint – as illustrated in the G-8 meeting of July 2009 – is that developed countries should commit themselves to mid-term or 10-year goals for reducing their emissions while at the same time supporting financially and technically poor countries in their fight to reduce emissions of harmful gases.

Thus over the past few years, we have witnessed numerous and often heated exchanges on global warming between industrialised countries (mainly Western European) on the one hand and a set of increasingly powerful developing countries led by China and India on the other. The

proceedings of the G-8 summit in L'Aquila also provide a good illustration of this, when developing countries – led by China and India – demanded that industrial countries were obliged to first set and achieve high emission reduction targets while at the same time making available to the latest within renewable energy technology to developing countries. And any drastic reductions in emissions by developing countries would harm their economic growth and their ability to provide benefits of development to their citizens. While the G-8 summit was in progress, and following a meeting of the so-called G-5 countries – consisting of China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa – the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh outlined the developing country perspective in the following manner:

As responsible members of the international community, we recognise our obligation to preserve environment. But climate change cannot be addressed by perpetuating the poverty of developing countries ... The developing countries have been worst affected by the weakened global economy.... We will stress ... the importance of maintaining adequate flow of finance to the developing countries and also of keeping markets open by resisting protectionist measures.⁹

The Brazilian President put things even more forcefully, claiming, 'We know who is liable for more pollution. The rich countries must agree to contain greenhouse gas emissions. We, developing nations, do not want to be treated as second class citizens of the world. We, too, want to go to the top floor.'¹⁰ In the period leading up to Copenhagen 2009, the rhetoric became a bit more subdued. What was made clear, at least from an African perspective, is that developing countries will require a substantial amount of financial incentives to be willing to cut emissions. Thus, in August 2009, leaders of ten African countries met in Ethiopia and demanded billions of dollars in compensation for the continent because of global warming-induced damage.¹¹ How much money will in the end be available for this purpose is highly uncertain. Many rich countries have in the past had a tendency of promising generous sums of money during major crises (e.g. to war-torn Afghanistan or tsunami-

affected countries in East and South Asia), but subsequently not following up such promises with actual transfers. Even if some astronomical sum of money as compensation is indeed agreed on, questions remain over how to control and administer such resources.

This brings us to the *process* of agreeing on a climate treaty – a process that has already started and where the UN conference in Copenhagen (COP 15) in December 2009 was one of a series of events towards the final goal. Before the Copenhagen meeting, the head of the UNFCCC had declared that in order to secure agreement, countries and their representatives need to reach agreements on four political essentials. First, to what extent are industrialised countries willing to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases? Second, how far are major developing countries such as China, Brazil and India willing to go in limiting the growth of their emissions? Third, how will the help – required by developing countries to reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change – be financed? Fourth, who will manage (and how) the funding for such measures?¹² Unfortunately, COP 15 failed to live up to expectations and rather than a binding commitment to begin to take action on global warming, the ensuing Copenhagen Accord ended up being merely a statement of intention that set climate-related goals for both developed and developing countries, but without enforceable targets or timetables. There were, however, some positive developments including progress made on the REDD initiative (that compensates developing countries for preserving forests, swamps and fields that efficiently absorb carbon dioxide), and long-term financial support mechanisms were offered by developed countries who jointly agreed to mobilise USD 100 billion a year by 2020 to meet the needs of developing countries.¹³ Despite these, the 190 participating countries, however, could not agree on a strict deadline for negotiating a binding international climate change treaty.

Even if a binding agreement is reached on global climate change in the near future, we need to question how this will be implemented, particularly in developing countries. Having discussed challenges related to guilt, responsibility and action required at the global level, it is time to address some of the challenges that exist at national and local levels. In the remaining sections of this essay, I will discuss a case from the

1990s that demonstrates that tackling local environmental problems is far from simple, even when addressing such issues is clearly of benefit to local populations. But even in a country like India, where there exists a substantial amount of environmental legislation together with political and administrative capacity, it is nonetheless difficult to implement such policies in practice. As the ensuing discussion will show, despite possessing all the necessary legislative and judicial instruments, the attempt to environmentally regulate a highly polluting industry largely failed in South India. How, then, can we expect to address such issues in countries where the policy environment and institutional capacity is much weaker? Moreover, even when rules exist, they may not only be disregarded, but such rule-breaking may further not lead to major consequences for the rule-breakers. How then will we tackle climate change at a global level when many of the measures will not necessarily have clearly identifiable local benefits?

ENVIRONMENT: THE LAST WAGON IN POLITICS?¹⁴

‘Sustainable development’ was the buzzword in the 1990s and during this period, I was involved in a study entitled ‘The Paradox of Pollution Control: Regulations and Administration in a South India State’. Together with Francesco Kjellberg, G. Koteswara Prasad and a handful of Indian colleagues at Madras University, I focused on the salient features of the legal and administrative framework of public authorities responsible for the implementation of pollution control in Tamil Nadu state in south India. According to scholars on environmental issues, India had at that time achieved significant changes in environmental policy since the early 1990s, especially in terms of regulatory procedures and organisational structure (Rosencranz et al. 1991). Nevertheless, environmental quality had continued to deteriorate, largely due to the gap between policy intent and actual achievement (Jain and Sharma 1989; Reich and Bowonder 1992).¹⁵ In the following sections, I will discuss the complexities of the relation between the rapid expansion of a highly polluting activity: the tanning industry, which is important in terms of foreign exchange earnings and its potential to employ large groups, and the environmen-

tal considerations embedded in public administrative structures in the North Arcot Ambedkar (hereafter NAA) district in Tamil Nadu.¹⁶ Having discussed the climate change discourse at the global level in the first part of this essay, I wish to now apply a local lens. Accordingly, the focus is on trying to understand the manner in which the implementation of an environmental strategy unfolds in addition to the specific content of the programmes, the specific shape they are given through operational guidelines and regulations and the organisational attributes of implementing agencies. Key questions include: Are there any discernible patterns of political and administrative relations? Is the administrative action permeated by a dominant ideology or a particular culture? How do administrative bodies relate to the actors in the socio-political sphere while implementing an environmental policy?

The case provides a useful context (the period covered is from the early 1980s until 1996) to study sustainable development in an area where pollution from tanneries had created havoc. Out of more than 900 tanneries in Tamil Nadu in the mid-1990s, NAA alone had around 570. Reliable data on the magnitude of degradation of the environment in the district due to pollution from the tanneries was not easily available. Estimates varied from a total ecological catastrophe affecting the entire district, to more conservative assessments of pollution which was restricted to certain townships and villages and affecting both agricultural land and drinking water. There was no dispute, however, that pollution – having gone unchecked for a number of years – had reached a dramatic level in the first half of the 1990s. The Palar River, running through the district and along which most tanneries are located, was said to be polluted for a length of about 100 kilometres (Krishnakumar 1996). Since the river is dry most of the year, effluents discharged had percolated into the ground water.

Pollution from the tanning industry in NAA had been going on for more than a decade when the Supreme Court of India, in May 1995, ordered the closure of 57 tanneries. In addition, the Court gave three months to the remaining units, close to 500, either to install effective Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP) or to join other tanneries in Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETP). Excerpts of the Order read:

Keeping in view the fact that this Court has been monitoring the matter for the last 4 years, and various orders have been issued by this Court from time to time, there is no justification to grant any further time to these industries. We, therefore, direct the 57 industries listed hereunder to be closed with immediate effect ... We direct the District Collector and the Senior Superintendent of Police of the district to have orders complied with immediately. (Supreme Court of India, Section PIL, Writ Petition (civil) No. 914/91, May 1st, 1995)

This Supreme Court order was the result of a writ petition filed in 1991 by a local civic association, the Citizens' Welfare Forum, as 'Public Interest Litigation' (PIL) a form of petition now increasingly accepted by the Indian Judiciary as a legal basis for filing cases to the Supreme Court.¹⁷ The petition argued that effluents from the tanneries in the district had devastated vast areas of agricultural land, and that, because these effluents were being constantly discharged on the surface of a dry river, drinking water around the area had become polluted (Krishnakumar 1995). In a more comprehensive judgement in 1996, the Supreme Court ordered both general remedies and specific actions relating to the situation in NAA. Suspending the closure orders in respect of all tanneries in the five districts of Tamil Nadu with a high concentration of tanneries (of which NAA had the highest), it directed all tanneries 'to set up CETPS or individual pollution control devices on or before November 30, 1996'. In addition, all tanneries were to 'obtain consent of the Pollution Control Board to function and operate from December 15th, 1996', and those 'tanneries that are refused the consent or fail to obtain the consent shall be closed forthwith'.¹⁸

The obvious question we needed to explain was as follows: How could this dismal situation develop in Tamil Nadu in spite of the existence of a set of legislative measures to combat industrial pollution dating back to the 1970s? Further, pollution went unchecked in spite of the existence of an administrative body, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) that was established in 1982 specifically to monitor industrial pollution in the State. India is far from being a 'soft state' – indeed, it possesses some of the most advanced institutions in the

developing world, but what can we say of the system? Does it work? If not, what is the problem? The ensuing analysis is of relevance not just for India but also for other developing countries who do not possess the institutional sophistication as India and hence may find it even more difficult to implement at local levels an agreement arrived at the global level.

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Three characteristics of the tanning industry in Tamil Nadu are crucial and provide a useful starting point for the study. First, closely associated with its long tradition, is the tanning industry's social composition. Since the industry deals with skins and hides of animals, particularly cattle, it has traditionally been regarded as a 'polluting' profession in the Hindu religious sense with caste Hindus actively avoiding being involved in it.¹⁹ Muslims, who even today account for more than 80 per cent of the tannery owners, have therefore, traditionally dominated the profession. The particularly segmented character of Indian society also implies that the workers in the tanning industry have overwhelmingly been recruited from one community, the so-called Scheduled Castes (sc).²⁰ Thus, the combination of these two groups Muslims and Scheduled Castes outside mainstream Hindu society had the potential of creating an explosive situation and this feature to a certain extent explains the apparent reluctance on the part of the responsible public agencies to act more energetically in controlling pollution from the tanneries.

Second, there was been a phenomenal growth of the industry in the two decades leading up to 1995, a growth that was even more pronounced in NAA than in India as a whole. For example, the annual export of leather and leather products increased dramatically (by approx. 20 per cent) in the period 1985–95. Further, about half of India's total export of leather and leather products originated in Tamil Nadu, a large share of it in NAA itself. This expansion was not only a function of the increasing demand for leather in the international market, but also of the policy by the central government, which strongly supported these exports (Krishnakumar 1995, 118). Tanneries in NAA district accounted for at least 35 per cent of Indian exports in the leather sector in 1995 and, according to estimates

of the major tanners' association (AISTHMA), employed more than 30,000 people, an additional 20,000 people being employed in the 75 leather-product units connected with the tanneries.

Third, while traditional tanning had been relatively eco-friendly – its 'vegetable process' being based on tree barks and extracts – the techniques practiced in NAA resulted in considerable pollution of the environment. In order to meet the increasing demand and exploit the greater potential for profit, Indian tanners switched in the early 1980s to chromium tanning. While reducing, largely, time and space required for production, the process of modern tanning produces wastewater with a high concentration of toxic wastes that include sodium chloride, sulphides and chromium compounds. Considering that as much as 40 litres of water is used in converting one kilogram of rawhide into finished leather, the volume of polluted water generated in the district was enormous. For years, as much as 30 million litres of untreated effluent water had been dumped every day into ponds, wells and rivulets in the district (Krishnakumar 1995; AISHTMA 1995; UNIDO 1996).

Despite some attempts to set up minor effluent treatment plants and some effort at building Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs), the situation described above was still valid for the environmental situation in NAA district until the mid-1990s. This, in spite of the existence, since 1982, of a public agency with the responsibility for pollution control, The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB). In addition to the tanneries, the other apparent villain of the story is, therefore, the TNPCB. Since the early 1970s, India has made energetic legislative attempts to deal with the environmental question and has established administrative structures to implement the new laws and regulations. Particularly relevant for this case, is the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974 (Government of India 1974). In Tamil Nadu, the Pollution Control Board was created in 1982. Originally named Tamil Nadu Prevention and Control of Water Pollution Board, it was made responsible for administering and enforcing regulatory enactments in the field of environment and pollution control. Later renamed Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB), it was to implement, as other State Pollution Control Boards (PCBs), all environmental statutes promulgated by the Parliament in New Delhi.

Particularly relevant for the TNPCB's relation to the tanneries are the specific rules, which provide the organisation the power to give 'consent' whenever new industries are established, and control of industrial sewage/trade effluent. The Act of 1974's general 'prohibition on the use of stream or well or sewer or on land for disposal of polluting matter' (Act 1974, Section 24) is specified in a sizeable number of more specific clauses (Articles 24 and 25). Contravention of this is 'punishable with imprisonment for a term not less than one year and six months, but which may extend to six years and with fine' (Article 43). In addition, the Act of 1974 gives the TNPCB the following powers: to lay down standards for sewage/trade effluent; collect samples of sewage/trade effluent from any industry; carry out certain works when the concerned industry has failed to carry out its directions and to recover the cost from the industry; take action at the presence of noxious or polluting matter in any stream or well etc., issue orders restraining or prohibiting the discharge of any such matter; issue direction for closure of the industry or for stoppage of electricity, water or any other service.

The TNPCB's role in relation to industries appears to have been taken seriously, at least with regard to the production of guidelines and regulations. Guidelines were, for instance, worked out for situating new industries, prescribing the distance from sensitive areas and restricting certain industries within one kilometre from specified water sources. Industries wishing to obtain TNPCB consent had to follow detailed procedures, which specify consent fee rates. Based on their potential for causing pollution, all industries were classified by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, as Red (highly polluting), Orange (less polluting) or Green (non-polluting).

Having studied the powers bestowed on the TNPCB by the various Acts as well as by the TNPCB's very own regulations and guidelines, we believed that every step in environmental control was meticulously specified. While this was a positive feature, it left TNPCB officials, particularly at the district level, with little discretionary power. Street level bureaucrats, i.e., field officers acting at the lowest operative level who deal directly and regularly with potential polluters, enjoyed even less discretionary powers. In sum, the pollution control instruments at

the disposal of the TNPCB appeared as a prototype of the legal mode: permits ('consent') according to definite criteria; specific regulations for monitoring the activity of an industry; detailed procedures to be followed by officials involved in pollution control; and clearly specified sanctions in case of non-compliance. As vented at the top echelon of the organisation, the TNPCB's activity had a 'quasi-judicial' character and was 'basically a technical activity; control and supervision'. A few critical voices at somewhat lower levels of the organisation bluntly defined TNPCB activity as a 'police functioning, leaving no space for discussing the procedures with the industries in order to tailor the monitoring more appropriately'. Such a control mode was in itself a formidable impediment to an efficient implementation of the organisation's function. The total dependency on the judiciary for the enforcement of these stringent regulations and procedures was bound to make things worse. The TNPCB did indeed take the provisions of the law in earnest. It pursued a rather activist line in the 1980s, filing a number of cases under the purview of Section 33 of the Act of 1974 against tanneries either for not having applied for 'consent' or for not having achieved the specified effluent standards. Most of these, however, remain stranded in the courts.

At this stage, a preliminary observation is unavoidable: In spite of its armoury of regulations and sanctions, the TNPCB failed to contain the increasing amount of pollution created by the tanneries in NAA. How can this seeming paradox be explained?

THE ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY OF A REGULATORY AGENCY

Whatever the reasons may be for the judicial delays noted above, the regulatory procedure was converted into an even more formalistic exercise than it might have originally been. In this respect, various explanations were forwarded to us, ranging from the lack of environmental expertise on the part of the courts (although this improved towards the second half of the 1990s with the introduction of 'green benches') to the staggering number of cases currently in the judicial system.

First, the sanctions imposed against illegal discharges met with other judicial impediments. Several reliable sources (including TNPCB engi-

neers, tanners and successive Collectors of NAA district) seemed to agree with the following view of an official we interviewed:

(The TNPCB) might issue a Show Cause Notice to close the tanneries. And if the reply is unsatisfactory or there is no reply, this would lead to steps to close the tanneries. The TNPCB has the authority to do that, but it does not have adequate means to get it enforced. For instance, it cannot cut the electric supply of the defaulting tanneries. According to the Indian Electricity Act, a notice has to be given and the perpetrators will immediately go to the Courts, where they get a stay order.

The TNPCB's plight was aptly summed up by a senior district official: 'The TNPCB is a big organisation without teeth'. In the few cases where the Courts had imposed fines on tanneries, the general view was that these did not function as a deterrent since fines often amount to only 'a few thousand Rupees'. One of the TNPCB's lower district officials substantiated this by stating that 'why should the tanners bother about fines which would not amount to more than what they would use for a normal dinner at a restaurant'.

Second, it seems to have become increasingly clear to everybody that the so-called 'tolerance limits' defined in the regulations were simply unachievable, mainly because the Palar river where the effluents were discharged was already polluted. Some officials, when queried on this issue took refuge behind a seemingly loyal silence. Thus many pointed to the inherent ecological limitations of implementing the prescribed pollution control standards.

Third, there was reason to believe that the laboratory testing of samples, conscientiously undertaken by 'street-level bureaucrats', was not fully reliable. Those advocating such a view, felt that because of this alleged suspicion regarding the reliability of analysed data, the actors concerned sometimes did not take the conclusions drawn from the results seriously enough.

Finally, a new form of control, the attempt to establish Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETP), was slowly introduced, in which the TNPCB became as much a spectator as an active participant. There were

indications that in the 1990s, the 'control mode' slowly started to change, with new concepts being introduced to supplement the pure regulatory mode. One such change was the replacement of individual Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) with CETPs. However, the mechanisms were not available to the organisation for it to take active part towards realising this end. There was, for example, no indication that any particular office was established in the TNPCB or that instructions were passed on to the regional and district administration to help organise these proposed CETPs. In essence, the TNPCB abandoned the idea, leaving it up to the tanneries to implement it with the help of a semi-public agency for leather and leather goods, the Tamil Nadu Leather Development Corporation (TALCO). The idea was to finance CETPs based on minimal public subsidy, public loans and commercial loans. We therefore concluded that this largely explained why no such CETP scheme was actually operative in the district when the Supreme Court issued its closure order of the tanneries in NAA in 1995.

There were, however, some attempts made by individual officials to introduce other control modes, particularly a more conscious 'information mode' targeted towards the industries as well as the public. For example a few middle-range officials vented the idea of widening the gamut of control measures, or at least to mould the legal control of the TNPCB with more informational elements. The scientists in the organisation were particularly conscious of the need to establish a dialogue with the tanners realising, more than others, the failure of a system based purely on legal control. One scientist held the following view:

Sampling is a scientific matter. Only scientists can say whether there is something wrong with the sampling process. Scientists should therefore have a role at the various stages of the process. The civil engineers do not have any expertise. Industrial pollution implies chemical and biological matters. One should inform the industries how the process works. Let the engineers monitor, but it is crucial that scientists evaluate and interpret the data since they are the ones who know the language. The TNPCB does only a policeman job; one should also advise the industries since pollution control technology is improving all the time.

In spite of the growing need for the establishment of an 'information mode', and scattered individual attempts, largely all attempts in this direction were mainly running against the very logic of the TNPCB. In addition, the extreme bureaucratic character (in the Weberian sense) of the organisation further contributed to its passive role and even negative impact as soon as its surrounding environment (the various actors) did not respond adequately to its general nature of legalistic control and monitoring. Clear instructions were sent from the top in accordance to relevant Acts and regulations, leaving hardly any doubt among the district officials regarding what should be done. In return, a staggering number of reports are sent regularly from the district TNPCB office in NAA to the Head Office in Madras detailing all the minutiae of the procedures followed in accordance with the instructions.

Despite several probes, we could not find any indication that the approaching ecological disaster, the contamination of drinking water and the devastation of agricultural land in NAA, was ever made into a major theme for discussion within the organisation. Indeed, the Steering Board of the TNPCB does not seem to have put this situation squarely on the agenda of any of its meetings.

There was no room in this ironclad administrative structure for any entrepreneurial 'fixer' and being virtually segregated from its social and political surroundings, the TNPCB hardly perceived any signals of where it was actually heading.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

There is considerable agreement in the implementation studies literature that the connection between the implementation agency and its surroundings is of paramount importance. And the evolvement of specific 'implementation structures' – forging a particular inter-organisational logic adequate for a specific task – has been perceived to be an essential condition for 'successful' implementation.²¹ Sharing this view to some extent, we attempted to map the 'reserve' of organisations, associations and public bodies that, in theory, could have contributed to the emergence of inter-organisational networks crossing established administrative boundaries. What were the main characteristics of the actors and

what are their links with the pollution control agency? We looked first at the party political actors and actors in organisational society, moving then to the public actors present in the actual situation of pollution control, attempting to assess the possible existence of an 'implementation structure'.

Political actors, political parties and unions

We had expected that the political parties, or at the very least some local politicians would have raised the issue of pollution as it increased to dramatic proportions in the late 1980s and early 1990s. What we found was that the major political parties and their elected representatives largely avoided the issue other than trying to influence the Steering Board of the TNPCB. This lack of interest by the political bodies comes out quite clearly if compared with their interest with other public agencies. There are, for instance, indications that political influence in typically redistributive policy issues like housing was far more pronounced than in the case of pollution control. And a former senior official of the TNPCB remarked, 'Politicians have kept eyes and ears shut about pollution. Environment is the last wagon in politics'. Others were of the view that politicians do not show any interest in environmental issues and although they do make 'some noise' immediately after elections, they subsequently find themselves under pressure from influential tanners and their lobby groups. And although the Supreme Court order in 1995 did slightly change this situation of indifference, only one minor political party had the issue of pollution on its platform in connection with the elections in 1996.

The same conclusion applies to interest organisations active in the district, i.e. the trade unions connected with tanneries and the Farmers' Association. Out of the seven major trade unions in the State (five of them are affiliated with political parties), two had been of some importance in NAA: *The Leather and the Leather Goods Democratic Trade Union*, and the *All India Central Trade Union*. Given that the tanning industry is typically an unorganised sector, these unions were quite weak and none of them boasted more than two thousand members each. Struggling to increase their membership among the numerous workers in the industry, these trade unions were very cautious in raising the pollution issue.

Quite predictably, in our interviews, the unionists primarily expressed concern with the large number of people without employment and the large number of families affected due to the closure of some tanneries. Even asserting that the workers in the tanning industry were concerned with the extent of pollution in NAA, representatives were of the view that the aim of the unions was 'a more efficient pollution control without affecting trade'. Despite this, unions mainly avoided any contact with the TNPCB. A local journalist claimed that the only interest of trade unions was related to wages. Still more striking is that the Farmers' Association did not attempt to raise the pollution issue, or to establish any connection with the TNPCB, let alone try to co-operate with the agency. It was hard to find any resonance in the Association of the fact that the farmers have been the group most affected by pollution. This was surprising since in the most devastated areas, some farmers had sold their land to tanneries for a meagre sum of money and migrated to neighbouring areas. Finally, a ruling party politician argued that the influence of the tannery owners explained why there was the general reluctance to initiate contact with the TNPCB and to work on pollution control: 'The tanneries used the workers to pressurise MLAs and no party was willing to take up the pollution issue seriously because the tanners have a stranglehold on all major political parties'.

The Citizen's Welfare Forum

The void left by the political parties and organisational society in general, opened the doors for one actor which was to play a key role in the development of the issue: The Citizens' Welfare Forum (hereafter Forum), the highly vociferous association established in 1986, which filed the now famous 'Public Litigation Case' (PIL) before the Supreme Court in 1991. To a remarkable extent, the Forum was a one-man organisation – an energetic lawyer based in Vellore – despite officially having around 80 members. The Forum was established based on his personal experience of the State government's inaction in 1985, when around 20,000 people protested against the increased effects of pollution from the tanneries and the adverse impacts this had on health, drinking water and related environmental costs of continued tannery activity. The activity of the Fo-

rum was twofold. First, it concentrated on legal actions very successfully. Second, it sent an unremitting flow of letters and petitions to Central and State level politicians, scientists and other potential actors on the pollution issue. The president of the Forum described it as follows: 'Realising that environment is a continuous process and not static, the Forum has taken upon itself the function of creating awareness among the citizens. The main mode of doing it is to write and write letters to all those who matter'. Moreover, the Forum passed numerous resolutions, without much success, to forbid the National Leather Fair – a yearly high-profile commercial event – from taking place in Madras (now Chennai). It also tried to pressurise lawyers and advocates into taking action on the pollution issue by making the District Bar Association boycott the local courts for one day.

The Forum's activity thus was not only been targeted against the tanneries and their associations, but also the pollution control agency and the State Government. Although it attempted to collaborate with governmental institutions, for instance, by proposing sponsorship of meetings and seminars on pollution in NAA or on the issue in general, this did not lead to any concrete forms of cooperation primarily on account of the lack of response by the State Government and the TNPCB. Once again, we find the avoidance of any meaningful contact between two major actors on the pollution issue a striking feature of the situation.

One final feature appeared to be of interest. In spite of the president's contention that it 'represents a cross-section of society', the Forum was largely composed of middle and upper class members of the community. It was therefore our impression that the organisation has a strong 'Brahmin' representation (upper castes in traditional Hindu society). Several actors, particularly the trade unions, also claimed that the Forum was associated with the Hindu nationalist BJP party and thereby shared some of the *Hindutva*²² culture of the BJP. Although this political and religious leaning certainly did not explain the Forum's anti-pollution crusade, we felt it threw some light on its strongly hostile stand against tanneries in general, given that tanneries were mainly owned and controlled by Muslims.

Public actors at the district level

The unit of administration throughout India is the district, a word of very definite meaning in official phraseology. The district officer, whether known as collector, district magistrate or deputy commissioner, is the chief executive officer of the district, vested with powers under various Central and State laws. Collectors do not have fixed tenure and are supposed to serve in a post for three years. However, recent studies show that Collectors are often given very short tenures and frequently transferred, with adverse implications for the implementation of development programmes in the districts (Banik 2001). One such issue, which apparently has been on the margin of successive Collectors' attention in NAA, has been the environment. No matter how much we probed, there was no indication that Collectors had taken initiatives on the pollution problem in NAA before the Supreme Court's decision to close down polluting tanneries in 1995. This inaction by successive Collectors may be partly explained by the general perception of the TNPCB as an 'autonomous body', i.e. outside the direct supervision of the Collector. However, we also find that there are indications that the usual 'sanctions' at the Collector's disposal, including a general police authority, were not mobilised except in one case that coincided with the Supreme Court action in 1995. Thus as long as the Collector did not have any direct formal responsibility on the pollution issue, he could simply shift the responsibility or ignore its existence. This passivity on the part of successive Collectors is open for interpretations of corruption or overt pressure by the State Government to stay away from the problem and not provoke the tanneries. For example, one may argue that the system of short tenures for Collectors, especially in the early phases of their career, is an invitation for corrupt acts or for the promotion of a bureaucrat-civil servant relationship of mutual benefit. However, we found no indication that outright corruption was a plausible explanation in this case although we received a few hints that the State Government might have, from time to time, 'reminded' (more or less forcefully) the Collectors to consider the enormous employment capacity of the tanneries and their importance to the State exchequer. What is abundantly clear, however, is that the Collectors have never had any extended contacts with TNPCB officials,

nor did they attempt to establish links with the Collectorate. The only arenas where the Collector and such official and non-official members meet were the so-called institutionalised committees.

One such committee was the District Development Committee (DDC) that is usually convened every three months to discuss long-term issues affecting the district. Chaired by the Collector, the DDC gathers representatives of public agencies in some way connected with 'development', including TNPCB officials and the elected representatives of the district (MLAs). Hence, it is a political body where sensitive issues and problems requiring action can be raised. Interestingly, and according to several sources, the pollution issue was indeed been hotly debated in the DDC, with MLAs, in particular, protesting against pollution. Such a view contrasted with the previous information we received regarding passivity of the MLAs on this matter. What is relatively clear, however, is that hardly anything appeared to have resulted from such debates in the DDC. This seemed to be in tune with the very nature of the DDC, which was an 'advisory body' and Collectors and the TNPCB were, therefore, not necessarily bound by decisions of the committee. The same applied to the District Environment Committee (DEC), a body specifically established in the 1980s to create a platform for contact and cooperation with the TNPCB. Seemingly a very important body in this context, the DEC hardly functioned at all in NAA or any other district in Tamil Nadu. The committee was seldom convened and when done so at all, it appeared to have a rather lean agenda and functioned even more as an 'advisory body' than the DDC.

Finally, there was an Agricultural Grievance Committee (AGC) with representatives of farmers' associations and under the leadership of the Collector that met every month and was generally perceived to be an important body (even if advisory in nature). Ideally the Committee ought to have provided a good opportunity for raising the issue of environmental development in the district. In fact, one Collector had the following to say: 'The pollution issue has regularly been brought up in the AGC. The grievances having been sent to the TNPCB, but the results have been meagre. Cases prosecuted have resulted only in fines of a few hundred rupees'. The reality appeared to be somewhat different. On the

one hand, the Collector's administration was reluctant to get involved in pollution control. To the extent that some action was taken, it was in reaction to serious grievances; no attempts were made to forge ties of co-operation with the TNPCB. Although there may have been concerns, due to sporadic protests and the activity of the Citizens' Welfare Forum, this did not result in any forceful initiative by the Collector until the Supreme Court verdict. On the other hand, we did find institutionalised arenas in the form of committees, where there were several attempts to bring the environmental issue to the fore. Unfortunately, not even these were able to provide a catalyst to an effort to shape a constructive scheme of co-operation between the various actors involved. In our analysis of the role of public and non-official actors, we therefore find no signs of an 'implementation structure' crossing administrative and organisational lines. The main responsible agency – the TNPCB – appeared to be working in splendid isolation, segregated from its surroundings. The sporadic attempts by some actors to fight pollution did not result in a stable network between them and the TNPCB. Contact between the TNPCB and other actors seem, more often than not, was characterised by confrontation and animosity, rather than co-operation.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

One of the main contentious questions in implementation studies is how to assess implementation failure. In our case this was hardly a problem. The control of pollution created by the tanneries in NAA was a failure. The tanning industry behaved recklessly and polluted considerable areas in Tamil Nadu, in particular rivers and fertile agricultural land in NAA district. The TNPCB, on its part, proved ineffective and provided tanneries with innumerable extensions to its deadline for the establishment of Effluent Treatment Plants. It was only the Supreme Court's catalytic judgements from May 1995 to April 1996 that finally mustered political and public attention to pollution control in Tamil Nadu. This was also the factor that opened the doors for a more active pollution control by the TNPCB. From being an organisation 'without teeth', it now had the backing of the judiciary to enforce its regulatory policies. However, the organisation continued to suffer from a combination of a rigid hierar-

chical structure (with frequent changes in leadership due to transfers of key personnel) and a general lack of feedback which contributed to its main focus being monitoring ('the policeman model'). In its task at attempting to control pollution from the tanning industry, the TNPCB was hindered by the saliency of a heavy 'top-down approach' and the restricted space for creative initiatives and the lack of flexibility of local officials. This together with an undiluted regulatory policy resulted in non-decision making in the face of crises. Local TNPCB officials in the districts could thus be identified with the 'statutory man model' ('if in disagreement, keep silent and obey orders'). When the organisation did indeed manage to operate effectively, it relied heavily on a handful of strongly committed individuals who provided an entrepreneurial form of leadership, often functioning in the role of the 'fixer'. However, such individuals were often subjected to allegations of corruption and criticisms varying from possessing a 'single track mind' to 'acting against rules and getting away with impunity' due to influential contacts. From a process-oriented perspective of implementation theory, we concluded that there was a need for stronger legitimisation of action in environmental issues and the Supreme Court verdict on pollution had to be constantly followed up by increased awareness among the general population and increased activity on the part of voluntary organisations. The TNPCB, unfortunately, tended to operate in splendid isolation from its surroundings.

Above all, sustained political support for environmental issues is crucial. In our case study, we found that implementation of pollution control not only lacked sustained political support but that the general political trend was one of ad hoc and short-term interventions. The primary reason for the general political passivity appeared to be the regulatory nature of the TNPCB, which is not as attractive for political interference as bodies in charge of administering redistributive policies. For instance, while most criticism directed against the TNPCB originated from outside agencies concerned with the long-term consequences of various natural resources, criticism of a redistributive policy like low-income housing usually came mostly from affected parties particularly, the intended beneficiaries of housing and their political backers. Indeed, it appears that one of the main reasons for the failure of pollution control in Tamil

Nadu, particularly in the period preceding 1996, was the relative indifference on the part of political actors involved. Thus environment was in fact the last wagon in politics.

In recent years, particularly since 2001, there appears to be a greater involvement of political parties and their leaders in the debate on environmental issues in general in India. Sections of the media have, for example, carried out sustained campaigns on the consequences of environmental degradation. As more actors are getting involved in the fields of sustainable development and climate change – the local community, labourers, industrialists and not least judicial institutions and environmentalists – politicians are increasingly under pressure to address them. This augurs well for the future.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In his bestselling book, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (2006), Al Gore makes the case that our climate crisis is happening at a very quick pace and has reached the stage of a ‘planetary emergency’. Nonetheless, he persuades us to view the current crisis not only as a sign of imminent danger but also one of opportunity. Towards this goal and ‘In order to face down the danger that is stalking us and move through it, we first have to recognize that we are facing a crisis.’²³ The signs so far in 2010 give the impression that world leaders are indeed hearing the warnings and may even be willing to act upon them. The question is, will such measures, when they happen, be enough to avert the crisis? As the World Bank’s flagship publication, the World Development Report 2010 (World Bank 2009b), notes, the opportunities for mitigation in poor countries are intrinsically linked to more sustainable use of land, forest management, cleaner energy and a radical change in urban transport. Thus we need to systematically integrate development and poverty concerns with climate change. The report, for example, has coined the term ‘climate smart development’, insisting on efficiency and equity as guiding principles for a climate deal. I think we need to be making a stronger case for the argument that poor countries can in fact shift to lower carbon solutions without compromis-

ing their development. Such a deal will not only require efficient climate finance and technology transfer mechanisms, but also a considerable amount of persuasion to convince people and their countries that they will stand to benefit from such a deal, even when it may appear – at least in the short term – that the agreement is unfair to them. The financial crisis, which has resulted in stalled or reduced growth, also poses a major challenge in the willingness of industrialised countries to continue with, or increase, their aid budgets in order to finance climate-friendly efforts in developing countries.

In this context, it is particularly interesting to explore how understandings of equity vary across countries and cultures and to what extent future meetings on a climate change treaty will be able to address this issue. In terms of financing the deal, it will be of further interest to see whether Nicholas Stern's (2009) recent cost-benefit argument – whereby spending 12 per cent of global output may prevent a significant rise in temperatures – will attract interest among industrialised countries. The positions of some of the major actors in a potential climate deal will by far be the most decisive factor in the years to come. For example, a considerable amount of change could be brought about in the United States if people simply switched from driving SUVs to sedans. This would correspond to the emission increase of providing basic electricity to 1.6 billion people without access to electricity (WDR 2010, 323). Moreover, in the first big study of the impact of the recession on climate change published recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA) expects China to have achieved the heaviest curbs on greenhouse emissions by 2020.²⁴ This contrasts sharply with the widespread image of a country with a carbon-intensive industry that is resisting international calls to curb its emissions. Similarly, India has signalled recently that it would set national numerical targets for curbing emissions for the first time, after insisting that it would not. While the stage appeared set for a global climate treaty in mid-2009, the Copenhagen Accord in December of the same year was a major disappointment. I have argued here that we need more bottom up pressures at national and local levels for changing government positions. Even if we do reach a global consensus in the immediate future, the case study from Tamil Nadu shows that translating

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such agreements into local action will be the real challenge in the years to come. And finally, just the use of the phrases such as 'global warming' or 'unprecedented change' may itself be a problem as it may convey the message that the problem is simply too big. Indeed some may react by saying, 'It is not my problem', or 'I cannot possibly do anything to change things'. Thus we must also revisit the ways in which we communicate our messages on such issues.

THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE

Deprivation of various forms affects large numbers of people in our world today. And the resulting human suffering, experienced on a daily basis, makes it pertinent to revisit the moral obligations that various groups of individuals, organisations and nations have towards responding to eradicating poverty in general and acute forms of deprivation in particular. One of the most deep-seated disagreements of our time, and one that is steadily gaining ground given the current global political challenges resulting from financial and climate change crises, concerns why those with the power to make fundamental changes ought to actually do so. Many contemporary discussions on the concepts of justice and equality have highlighted the unequal distribution of wealth between societies, citing the enormous differences in living standards, quality of life and in the enjoyment of various types of socio-economic and political freedoms. Thus there has been a focus on historical injustices related to colonialism and exploitation of natural resources, unfair terms of international trade and favours extended to brutal and viciously anti-poor regimes in the developing world simply on the basis of political alliances formed during the Cold War period. The 1980s and the 1990s, especially after the end of the Cold War, provided an impetus for a new wave of democratisation and the disbursement of development assistance which rewarded a country for taking positive steps towards 'structural adjustment', 'good governance' and the promotion of socio-economic and political rights. In recent years, however, it appears that the willingness of developed countries to bear the cost of develop-

ment in poor countries is perhaps not as strong as it was two decades ago. Indeed, the current political debates in many developed countries (including Scandinavia) – heavily influenced by the financial downturn and concerns for the climate – are a good indication that the voices of those questioning the entire exercise of helping strangers in distant lands are getting louder, as they articulate a fear of a possible reduction in their own welfare that may result from changing consumption patterns and possible cutbacks in existing welfare models in affluent countries.

The situation today, with the financial and climate change crises firmly in place, in addition to the ongoing food crisis, provides an opportune moment to revisit an important debate that took place in the 1970s on the ethics and moral obligations of offering food aid amidst global food shortages and famine in many parts of the world. Are we morally obliged to express solidarity with the poor in distant lands? If so, how? Moreover, how can individuals and groups in such affluent countries influence the policies of their own governments in terms of the provision of aid of various types – ranging from long-term development aid to more short-term humanitarian or emergency-oriented assistance aimed at preventing the large-scale loss of life that is often the result of a particular type of natural and man-made disaster? Thus, the first section of this essay will focus on global level obligations to combat deprivation.

There is also an uncanny reluctance in international and national discourses on aid to focus on the problem of inequality and its production *within* societies and the roles and responsibilities of privileged and affluent national and local elites in combating deprivation in their surroundings. Hence, it has become politically correct to speak of poverty reduction in developing countries without taking issue with fundamental inequalities within such societies that produce poverty in the first place. Indeed, many developing countries have historically sustained privileged individuals and groups who are often largely responsible for important socio-economic and political decisions in their localities. And many such decisions have often contributed towards creating, and in certain cases worsening, human deprivation. In addition, such elite decisions are often made in collaboration with western states, corporations and development agencies, which often play an important role in training these

elites. Hence, in the second part of this essay I will examine the extent to which local elites in areas with high levels of poverty and deprivation can be held ‘more’ responsible for providing assistance to the needy than those in faraway places, including regional and national capitals, affluent foreigners, tourists and complete strangers.

Common for both groups – individuals in affluent countries as well as affluent individuals in poor countries – is the question of whether they consider deprivation to be a misfortune, which requires calls for beneficence, charity and help. In addition to their own roles, how do they view the role of their governments, international development agencies and NGOs in promoting positive welfare rights? In other words, is there a moral obligation on the part of those –irrespective of their geographical area of residence – who have ‘more than enough’ to share some of their wealth and resources with other locals who have ‘less than enough’?

DEPRIVATION AND AID

The deprivation metaphor captures the essential significance of disadvantage by implying some kind of lack or insufficiency. For instance, it implies that standards of sufficiency can be specified in some degree as, for example, in unemployment and in nutritional requirements. This, however, should not obscure the fact that the metaphor also has related limitations. For example, norms or criteria for sufficiency (threshold values) are not always available and further, may not be well established. Another limitation is the fact that the condition of disadvantage can often be characterised just as significantly by the excess of certain kinds of stimulation or environmental attributes as by the absence or limitation of others. Despite the above limitations, I choose here to define deprivation broadly to include not just lack of adequate food intake but also lack of access to safe drinking water, absence of minimal preventive health care, persistent unemployment, social exclusion, etc. These correspond to what Shue (1980) calls ‘subsistence rights’ and what are often termed indicators of absolute poverty. Thus deprivation affects different aspects of people’s lives, existing when people are denied opportunities to work, to learn, to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and to live out their years in security.

In order to flesh out the moral dilemmas involved in providing assistance of various types, I will focus mainly on the issue of food, or lack of access to food. Hunger and famine continue to torment millions in various parts of the world with unrelenting frequency. That famine is not a thing of the past was once again highlighted as in October 2009, while preparing to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1984 famine, the Ethiopian government requested the international community for emergency food aid for more than six million of its citizens. Indeed, recent food crises resulting in hunger, starvation and famine have, more often than not, resulted from the tragic consequence of human activity – economic marginalisation, population pressures on land, environmental stress and political struggle – even when triggered by a discrete natural event. The sensational nature of famine has, traditionally, attracted more attention than the silent persistence of endemic hunger that does not lead to immediate death.¹ That this is increasingly a major cause of concern is borne out by the fact that over one billion people in the world go hungry every day, more than two thousand million people lack essential micro-nutrients, and hundreds of millions of adults and children suffer from diseases caused by unsafe food or by unbalanced food intake (FAO 2009, 8–10). Moreover, recent estimates also show that chronic hunger has been on the increase since 1995–97 in virtually all regions of the world (*ibid.*).

While millions suffer the daily anguish and pain of persistent hunger and famine, we may seldom feel that we can help improve the situation. News reports of emaciated adults and children in Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan or North Korea may invoke a feeling of despondency in us. And we may debate the best course of action and our own roles. What forms of solidarity, if any, should we extend to those suffering from severe deprivation? How can we best assist those in need? When material conditions improve for us, it may be difficult to continue being interested in, or imagine, how things are for people less well off. In the past few decades, a considerable volume of academic literature has focused on economic, social and political aspects of hunger and famine. The relevance of applying ethical reasoning to the study of problems of hunger is nowadays well accepted. If ethical reasoning can criticise established norms and practice, and simultaneously reach out to agents and agen-

cies involved in the process, then it may be capable of providing a useful framework to deliberate remedial measures to tackle the problem. Such deliberation may, for instance, begin by identifying certain situations as problems in need of remedy or resolution, and then question what needs to be done (O'Neill 1986, 7, 10).

In the introduction to their classic, *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, Aiken and LaFollette (1977) highlight some of the difficulties in applying ethical reasoning in regard to food aid. Thus, although it is good to feed starving people, it does not mean that those in a position to help are morally required to do so. And even though, by helping, a person may do a good thing, commit an act of charity or acquire a good conscience, it still does not mean that this person is morally required to render any sort of assistance. Accordingly, there appear to be three major alternative positions available to an individual if we assume that the issue of hunger should be treated as a moral question. First, there is the view that in spite of awareness of the existence of widespread world hunger and starvation, everyone (individuals and governments) is morally required *not* to offer food assistance. This is the Neo-Malthusian view, made famous by, among others, Garrett Hardin and his concept of 'lifeboat ethics' and 'tragedy of the commons'. Second, some may argue that it would be good to assist the starving even though there is no moral requirement (duty) to do so. This is, for instance, the libertarian position, exemplified in the work of Robert Nozick. And finally, there is the argument that affluent people – be they in rich countries or local elites in hunger-hit areas – should feed those suffering from starvation, since anything else would amount to a moral wrong. This is the consequentialist position, championed by, among others, Peter Singer. In addition, to the above major categories, there are also innumerable hybrid views, which I shall consider while discussing the above three positions.

WE ARE MORALLY REQUIRED *NOT* TO OFFER FOOD ASSISTANCE TO THE STARVING

In his *Principle of Population*, Thomas Malthus (1798) argued that social happiness would greatly diminish if the world's population continued to

increase unless this growth was checked radically. The argument was that population growth will outstrip food production and, given the limited amount of land and resources available in the world, disaster is imminent unless fertility rates are made to decline. Indeed, given the spate of famines we have witnessed around the world in the past few decades, Neo-Malthusians and 'ecologically-oriented ethicists' have warned that indiscriminate food aid will simply fuel a population explosion, and that this will lead to increased problems for all in the future (Ehrlich 1971; Meadows et al. 1972). They argue that food aid does not result in any benefit and one of the most well known (and controversial) theorists arguing for this position is Garrett Hardin (1972; 1996). He uses the concepts of 'lifeboat ethics', 'carrying capacity' and the 'tragedy of the commons' to argue his case against helping the starving. The following is a brief summary of some of the main points in Hardin's argument over the years.²

Lifeboat ethics, as formulated by Hardin, advances three basic propositions. First, there is not enough food in the world to match the world's population growth. Second, the source of the problem of food scarcity is the unrestricted population growth in poor countries, which are often vulnerable to famine and require constant external assistance. Third, rich nations have ownership rights to the food they produce, and as such, there is no moral requirement to share this with the starving world. Hardin thus claims that all nations have a specific 'carrying capacity'. This is the maximum number of people that a nation can support within its territory without risking its capacity to feed its population. Accordingly, many nations have already exceeded, or threaten to exceed, their carrying capacity as increased birth rates and decreased death rates results in a population explosion. This results in protracted situations of hunger and starvation, which then generate the need for food aid from affluent individuals and nations. Under such circumstances, giving food aid to these countries (thereby interfering with the outcome of starvation) will only serve to reduce the death rate and eventually increase the birth rate (those saved from starvation deaths will later procreate). Accordingly, 'If poor countries received no food from the outside, the rate of their population growth would be periodically checked by crop failures and famines' (Hardin 1996, 10). Hence, food aid encourages a nation to

exceed or further exceed (if it already has reached the limit) its carrying capacity. Citing the Indian food crises of the 1970s, Hardin arrives at the conclusion that food aid is morally wrong since it worsens, for those who survive and for future generations, the food availability situation and the quality of life. He asks, 'Will our good intentions be sufficient excuse for the consequences of our actions?' (ibid., 12).

Hardin further observes that one should not give food assistance even if this can be achieved at little or no cost to oneself. Those who find this position morally abhorrent – and 'guilty about their own good luck' – are asked to get out of the lifeboat and yield their place to others. The needy person to whom the guilt-ridden person yields his place will not himself feel guilty about his good luck. If he did, he would not climb aboard. The net result of conscience-stricken people giving up their unjustly held seats is the elimination of that sort of conscience from the lifeboat (ibid., 6–7).

Thus the basic premise of Hardin's thesis is that there are limits to economic growth, especially in relation to food and energy shortage in the world. If a system of unrestricted individual consumption of resources continues, as is the present scenario, then those who are selfish, greedy, clever and cunning will be able to victimise everyone else. And if a piece of property becomes a commons, open to all, then the right of one to use it does not automatically ensure that there is a corresponding responsibility to protect it. Therefore, in terms of food, the chronically hungry, by receiving food assistance, will eventually ensure that the rest of the world also starves. This is the fundamental error of the sharing ethic and inevitably leads to the 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin 1972).

If everyone would restrain himself, all would be well; but it takes only one less than everyone to ruin a system of voluntary restraint. In a crowded world of less than perfect human beings, mutual ruin is inevitable if there are no controls. This is the tragedy of the commons. (Hardin 1996, 8)

Hardin argues that only the replacement of the systems of the commons with a 'responsible system of control' will prevent the further destruction of land, air, water and oceanic fisheries. A further problematic feature of the tragedy of the commons and a potentially tragic course of action is

that there exists the freedom to reproduce in the belief that everyone has an equal right to the commons.³ Therefore, he justifies public interest in birth control (Hardin 1972, 257–258). In sum, the argument is the following: ‘For the foreseeable future, our survival demands that we govern our actions by the ethics of a lifeboat, harsh though they may be. Posterity will be satisfied by nothing less’ (Hardin 1996, 15).

As can be expected, Hardin’s views have been highly controversial. In one of the first critical responses to this thesis, Verghese (1976, 151) described the lifeboat ethics argument as a clear case of ‘advanced muddlement’ since ‘if there is one conclusion that is growing upon most informed persons in our time, it is the idea that we are all “in the same boat”’. Population control is only part of the problem of world justice; the real problem is rooted in the relationships between nations as well as on the individual relationships within nations. However, Hardin has also his fair share of supporters who often seek to modify his approach by stipulating certain conditions under which the right to refuse food aid can be justified. For example, and as discussed in chapter 5, James Lovelock (2009) believes that human activity has started a chain of events – starting from the time humans began using fire and tools on purpose and worsening with the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century – that has adverse effects on the way in which the Earth functions, and that this process is irreversible. And the explosive growth in human population on Earth is only disruptive. Lovelock therefore supports the Malthusian warning of fatal consequences such rapid increase in population will have on the earth as well as on human well-being (for example with the growing frequency of famines resulting from a shortage of food). And Fletcher (1977, 57) notes that ‘The fundamental error of the sharing ethic is that it leads to the tragedy of the commons *if it is practised without critical limits*’.⁴ Hence, unconditional famine relief only adds to protract human misery, and if this is shown to be true, then it is immoral for the affluent to share their wealth. However, if proven otherwise, food should be given to the starving, but only as a temporary measure and only when there is a reasonable possibility that the country’s population can be lowered to a level below its ‘carrying capacity’. Responding to this, Aiken and LaFollette (1977, 4) argue that there is probably only one justification that

can be used to argue that it is morally wrong to feed the starving. Such a justification depends on whether it can be proven that by giving food aid, the population of starving areas increases dramatically and in turn greatly diminishes world food supply. However, if such predictions for the future are mistaken, then the issue of providing food aid becomes more compelling. Similarly, Rachels (1977) and others argue that Hardin's and similar projections for the future are unrealistic and paint too gloomy a picture of the possibilities since there is a lack of conclusive evidence to support such future projections. Instead, one can make the argument for vegetarianism – that it is morally wrong for individuals in affluent countries to eat meat, since the production of meat, in addition to causing great animal suffering, also leads to the wastage of large amounts of edible protein. Thus protein, instead of being used to rear cattle, should be used to feed the world's starving (Verghese 1976; Hinds 1976). The natural question to ask at this stage – and given the recent world food crisis in 2007–2008 and a decline in food availability in many parts of the world after unprecedented increases in world food production in the 1990s – is whether it is possible to accept Hardin's grim projections of nations exceeding their 'carrying capacity' in the future. It is also unclear as to how many countries today have exceeded their carrying capacities, and whether it is possible to identify countries that are on the verge of doing so. What is, however, increasingly being talked of nowadays – given the increased world attention on the consequences of climate change – is the need to change our consumption patterns. Thus, in relation to food, the growing purchasing power of middle-class households in countries like India and China has apparently resulted in increased consumption of meat, which in turn requires increased production of corn that releases more greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Similarly, there is now considerable focus on forms of transport that leave less of a carbon footprint and on energy efficiency.

THERE IS NO GENERAL DUTY TO HELP THE STARVING

Most Libertarians prefer to interpret the ideal of liberty as a negative ideal by the absence of interference from others in doing what one wants

to do; one derives a right to life (not to be killed unjustly), a right to freedom of speech, press and assembly, and a right to property (Sterba 1996, 134). There is no duty to help others irrespective of relations within societies or relations among nations in the world. One formulation of this approach is that as long as people do not invade each other's liberty/freedom and harm one another, then this consists of norms of society that enable people to live together (Harman 1977). Libertarians argue that there is a difference between the *negative liberty* preconditions of lying, cheating, killing, breaking promises, etc. on the one hand, and the *positive liberty* conditions of helping the suffering on the other. This does not, however, mean that there cannot exist special relationships (e.g. to parents, children, and friends) that enable us to feel a duty to care. Consequently, although features of benevolence, charity, etc. have intrinsic 'goodness', they imply a moral obligation beyond the call of duty. Narveson (1977) brands this to be the 'conservative' position, according to which there is no moral duty to feed others since no harm is committed by not providing food; failing to assist does not constitute the same thing as that of a moral wrong. Therefore morality is primarily negative, according to such a view, and those starving do not have the right to any form of aid from the well-off. And Robert Nozick (1974), one of the most prominent Libertarians, argues for the minimalist state limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, fraud, enforcement of contracts, etc. He writes that 'any more extensive state will violate persons' rights not to be forced to do certain things', and that 'the minimal state is inspiring as well as right' (ibid., ix). It follows that 'the state may not use its coercive apparatus for the purpose of getting some citizens to aid others, or in order to prohibit activities to people for their *own* good or protection' (ibid.).⁵ Therefore, even though each person respects the other's liberty and rights as a constraint on individual action (negative liberty), this does not involve the positive liberty or duty to assist others. For Nozick, individual rights to life, liberty, and legitimately acquired property are absolute and any act or law that violates this absolute right cannot be justified. However, no individual or group has the right to assist others in the preservation of their rights. This is in contrast to John Rawls's view, which counters the dominance of utilitarian explanations

in normative ethics. For Rawls, if people chose principles of justice for a future society behind a 'veil of ignorance' (limiting what they could know of their own position in society), then they would not aim to maximise overall utility. In doing so, people will be able to guard themselves against worst possible outcomes by applying two principles. The first principle requires that wealth be distributed to increase the welfare of the worst-off members of society, i.e. to make them as well-off as possible. The second principle, the 'maximin' principle, if applied, aims to maximise the welfare of those at the minimum level of society (Rawls 1971).

As one of Rawls' severest critics, Nozick maintains that one must respect the rights of those who go about their lives without infringing on other's rights. This implies that even if others are starving there is no obligation to share one's food with them. One may, though, appeal to the generosity of rich people, but no one can force the rich to provide relief to the poor and starving. If individuals have acquired their wealth through legitimate means and without violating the rights of others, then no one, not even the state, has the right to take this wealth away for purposes of redistribution without their consent. Hence, rights cannot be overridden for the sake of welfare. And Ronald Dworkin (1977), while agreeing with Nozick that rights cannot be overridden for purposes of general welfare, argues that there is a need to broaden this view. He derives his concept of rights from a fundamental right to equal concern and respect, making his conception of rights much broader than Nozick's. By respecting other human persons, it becomes very difficult for one to refuse to assist those needing help. In this process, Dworkin opens for an increased role of the state in intervening in certain areas and ensuring that rights are respected.

Despite the emphasis on negative liberty, some believe that adherence to the libertarian theory of justice does not rule out endorsing a right to welfare and equal opportunity, which may also include a right to satisfy basic needs, including food needs, of others (Sterba 1994). Indeed, it may be quite unreasonable to ask the poor to willingly relinquish their liberty 'the liberty not to be interfered with in taking from the rich what they require to meet their basic needs'. In contrast, it would not be so unreasonable to expect or require the rich to relinquish their liberty of

meeting some of their luxury needs so that those starving may have the possibility of exercising the liberty of meeting their acute needs. Under these circumstances, James Sterba makes the case that the rich cannot claim to have relinquished a liberty involving unreasonable sacrifice, and therefore the libertarian position is capable of recognising the importance of combating hunger (ibid., 72–73). Still others consider ‘the right to be saved from starvation’ to be a positive *in rem* right (a general right of entitlement to certain goods) in contrast to the negative *in rem* right (a right to non-interference) to liberty (Aiken 1977, 89). Such an emphasis on positive rights is justified by the appeal to a moral principle promoting maximum individual welfare to all. Indeed, since the right to be saved from starvation preserves the fundamental positive right to life, Aiken shows that there are strong reasons to argue for increased priority to the welfare principle over the (non-interference) liberty principle. Further, one can also question whether there exists a clear conception of what libertarians argue as constituting ‘harming’ someone else’s liberty. As Dower (1991, 280) puts it, ‘Where does, in the competing of interests, a legitimate infringement of another person’s liberty end and an undue infringement start?’ This is crucial since it is often ‘the cumulative effects of many individual acts that cause the harm’.⁶ Moreover, one also needs to distinguish between ‘doing’ and ‘letting happen’, i.e. the ‘acts-omission’ principle in the understanding of morality. If libertarians accept that killing a person is morally wrong, then it is difficult to understand why it is morally right to let someone starve to death (ibid., 281).

THE AFFLUENT HAVE A MORAL DUTY TO FEED THE STARVING

Consequentialist reasoning, which highlights results of individual and collective action, is said to provide a number of advantages for the discussion of famine, persistent poverty and hunger. The essence of consequentialism is the idea that right action will lead to good results. Individual action as well as institutional and collective action produces results that can be assessed thoroughly by consequentialist reasoning, which is deeply entrenched in matters of daily life, especially in the decision-making

procedures of innumerable agents and agencies. Given this, it is understandable that many ethical deliberations on hunger and famine have been broadly consequentialist in nature (O'Neill 1986, 52–54). One of the best known arguments is the one by Peter Singer,⁷ who was moved by the famine in Bangladesh and wrote a series of articles in favour of the moral obligations of affluent countries and individuals to support the starving in various parts of the world. Singer begins with the assumption (the first principle) that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad. He then goes on to propose a second principle, that 'if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it' (Singer 1996, 28).⁸ Subsequently, Singer qualifies this second principle into a weaker version by adding 'very' to 'bad' and changing 'importance' to 'significance'. In order to illustrate this, he uses a simple example.

If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing. (Singer 1996, 28)

Singer identifies the responsibility to a certain extent that humans have for not allowing bad things to happen when such bad things can be prevented by human action. Moreover, hunger and starvation qualify as being the foremost among such bad or evil things. It follows then that most affluent Western lifestyles are not of comparable moral importance or significance as starvation. Singer's second principle does not consider any account of proximity or distance even though he accepts that assisting a person physically near us (with whom we have personal contact and are aware of her/his urgent needs), increases the likelihood that we will offer our help. However, in this age of modern communications, we are aware of hunger in Sudan or Ethiopia (perhaps not so in the case of North Korea or Burma) as much as we may perhaps be aware of groups facing the problem in our neighbourhood. Hence, Singer believes there is no reason for discriminating on geographical grounds and notes that

his second principle does not make a distinction ‘between cases where I am the only person who could possibly do anything and cases in which I am just one among millions in the same position’ (ibid., 28). Citing his earlier example, he claims that he is no less obliged to pull the drowning child out of the pond if he realises that other persons, at the same distance as he, are witnessing the child’s plight without reacting. Hence, numbers do not lessen obligation and people who accept other moral duties – such as keeping promises and telling the truth as being intrinsically right – should also accept the above stated principle. If they are sincere in not breaking such rules (i.e. of comparable moral importance), they ought to prevent, to the best of their ability, what is ‘very bad’ from taking place until marginal utility is reached. In other words, one should undertake such action until one would be doing as much harm to one’s own interests as one would be doing good to others (Singer 1996, 36; Dower 1998, 30).

Singer’s argument so far then is that when giving money to save starving groups, the traditional distinction between ‘duty’ and ‘charity’ – which considers giving money to be a charitable act (subject to praise), whereas by not giving money a person does not do anything wrong (and is not condemned) – cannot be supported. The argument is that one does not cater to any important need by indulging in worthless (non-essential) consumption like purchasing new clothes or a new car. Rather, one ought to give money for combating hunger. Recognising that one could object to this position in terms of it being too drastic a revision of conventional morality, Singer nonetheless argues that saving the lives of millions of people outside one’s own affluent society should be considered to be at least as urgent as that of upholding property norms within one’s own society (Singer 1996, 32). Consequently, ‘we ought to be preventing as much suffering as we can without sacrificing something else of comparable moral importance’ (ibid., 33).

Since Singer published his first article on this topic, a number of views have been forwarded, both in support and in criticism. It is difficult to not generally sympathise with Singer’s position, and Cullity (1994; 1996) writes that it is wrong of affluent individuals to not contribute money to voluntary aid organisations. He draws a ‘Life Saving Analogy’ between

failing to contribute money to such agencies and failing to make the kind of effort to save a life in front of one's own eyes (similar to Singer's example of saving the drowning child). Nonetheless, and in addition to the obvious criticisms from Neo-Malthusians, a typically Libertarian response has been to point out that Singer fails to clearly show that there exists a moral obligation on the part of the affluent to aid those starving elsewhere (Arthur 1996). Not only does he not analyse the crucial notion of 'morally significant', but he also treats his two examples – of dirtying one's clothes and being well dressed – as being morally *insignificant*. On the contrary, these examples can actually be considered morally *significant* by distinguishing between the potential value of being 'well dressed' and the actual value that a person may enjoy and create by being well dressed (in comparison to the unhappiness averted by being poorly dressed). Hence, Arthur concludes that both the strong and weak principles that Singer argues for are inadequate. Instead, he advocates, 'If it is in our power to prevent death of an innocent without sacrificing anything of substantial significance then we ought morally to do it' (ibid., 48); and that based on a principle of benevolence, well-off people may, in certain situations, have a duty to assist the starving, though this is not morally required of them. Since these well-off persons *also* have their own rights (for instance, over property, etc.), under various circumstances, their decision to assist would go beyond what is morally required of them. In such cases, assistance, if provided, can be described as 'charity'. Arthur, therefore, recognises the provision of assistance to the starving also as an act of charity, in contrast to Singer, according to whom this traditional view of charity is unacceptable.

Several objections to Singer's position also seem to target the requirement for heroic sacrifice, i.e. net benefit to the starving will only occur when a high proportion of income is transferred from the affluent to the poor (O'Neill 1986, 57). Such criticism stresses that the 'only the best thing will do' aspect that consequentialists emphasise, is problematic and leaves little room for good but sub-optimal action. As such, consequentialist arguments suffer from an 'overload of obligations' (ibid.). Another interesting perspective on this relates to Fletcher's (1976) point that while generosity is important, such virtues can become addictive. And 'once

hooked, we practice them without restraint' (ibid., 52). He goes on to argue that that survival is both a biological and an ethical imperative, and that one should 'give if it helps but not if it hurts'. Similarly, and in an attempt to extend Singer's argument, Nigel Dower (1998) argues that affluent persons also have rights (and even duties) to pursue their own interests and projects, even if by refraining from the usage of such rights, more good could be achieved in the world. He justifies the pursuit of own interests by highlighting that affluent persons also have special relationships with (and duties to) specific individuals, such as family and friends, which may often override considerations of general good (ibid., 30). By modifying Singer's insistence on doing all one can in efforts to halt starvation, Dower proposes a strategy of collective action, which is seen to be best capable of reaching this desired end. If individuals are willing to contribute some time, energy and resources, then they should send a message to their respective governments, and private companies of their choice, regarding their concerns about current anti-famine/anti-hunger policies and how these can be redesigned and improved (ibid., 31). The importance of this line of reasoning is best seen when one extends the issue at stake to apply to not only immediate famine-relief purposes, but also for the prevention of chronic hunger – an issue I will discuss in subsequent sections of this essay.

THE CASE FOR INCREASED, EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY INTERVENTION

While consequentialists emphasise the moral duty to aid the starving, the libertarian view argues just the opposite. While the former strongly advocates a strong moral obligation to feed the starving, the latter does not, although generosity is permitted. Even as consequentialists advocate a moral duty to assist the poor and starving, and libertarians recognise the 'goodness' of generosity, most Neo-Malthusians argue strongly against any moral requirement for food assistance. While it would be an exaggeration to extrapolate the above discussion to apply to the current trends in foreign aid, it nonetheless serves as an important reminder that poverty and related suffering does not automatically generate the kind

of response that most of us hope would be the case. And this relates to both long-term development assistance as well as emergency assistance necessitated from disaster-induced suffering. Given the increased visibility that the climate change agenda has achieved in recent times, it has become far more acceptable to openly (and perhaps often uncritically) subscribe to Neo-Malthusian fears of the adverse impacts on nature that can result from unchecked growth of the human population. Consequently, starvation-related deaths are viewed as being nature's solution to an impending crisis. There are also other arguments that are being increasingly voiced in the political debates in many rich countries. One such argument is related to the notion of 'particularity', which maintains that we have a special obligation to take care of our own (e.g. our family and loved ones, our town, our nation, etc.). Such obligations take precedence over any obligations to help those who are distant from us. Following from this is the understanding that local actors (especially local elites) are best placed to figure out what is best for the local population just as we have the necessary and the best preconditions for knowing what should be done for those living close to us. Yet another argument against increased aid is often forwarded on the grounds of 'effectiveness'. Hence, some advocates of particularity (including those who in principle support the idea of helping the poor in other countries) may maintain that due to corruption, incompetence and wastage of resources in poor countries – and irrespective of our moral obligations – it is simply more efficient for us to take care of our own. This gives us a 'moral division of labour' in which each group is entrusted with caring for the welfare of that group as a whole.

Thus the motivation among industrialised (donor) countries to provide aid to poor countries aimed at the purpose of development (often termed as 'official developed assistance' or ODA) is not necessarily always based on altruism and humanitarian concerns related to the extent and degree of poverty and inequality in the world. Indeed, it is now well-established that while many donors may in fact be interested in promoting economic development in poorer regions of the world, political ideology, foreign policy, commercial interests and national security play a major role in deciding who gives aid to whom (OECD 1999). Although there are

numerous reasons – including political, bureaucratic and organisational constraints – that explain poor development performance in aid recipient countries, an important and often unsung explanation relates to the pattern of the flows of aid (Alesina and Dollar 2000). Thus voting patterns in the United Nations and political and strategic considerations are given more weight by some donors than the type and severity of need to be addressed. And the reality is one where, ‘An inefficient, economically closed, mismanaged non-democratic former colony politically friendly to its former colonizer, receives more foreign aid than another country with similar level of poverty, a superior policy stance, but without a past as a colony (ibid., 33). While the Nordic countries are more likely to provide assistance to countries based on levels of income, quality of institutions and policy openness, the French typically tend to favour their former colonies; the policy of the United States is considerably influenced by its interests in the Middle East, and friends of Japan in the United Nations tend to receive more aid (ibid., 33–34).

The arguments in favour of aid typically emphasise the positive and significant impact that aid has on growth – even though the magnitude of such an effect may be low – the fact that aid finances crucial public investment required for physical and human capital infrastructure, that aid may often improve fiscal management and that sustained donor-recipient dialogue with flexible conditionality can promote reform and increase the effectiveness of aid.⁹ The debate on the effectiveness of aid is immensely complex and available evidence shows a mixed result. And depending on what our personal preferences are, we can surely make a persuasive case based on a selected analysis of the available evidence and cases where aid has succeeded and failed.

However, and in addition to the discussion in the previous section (in particular the overview of Singer’s argument), there are four further sets of interrelated issues that provide a justification to individuals and groups in affluent countries that favour a continuation, if not an increase, in foreign aid.¹⁰ The first is the argument from virtue and is closely associated with the moral force typically associated with suffering. In other words, when confronted with convincing evidence and vivid images of acute suffering, we cannot help but respond with compassion. Thus the

images shown on BBC television during the Ethiopian famine in 1984 and the photographs published subsequently in major international dailies are largely considered to have focused world attention on the problem which also resulted in a reaction from the international community. During such situations, it may also be natural to ponder the issue of luck and the enormous difference it makes to be born in the right part of the world. Moreover, compassion is particularly reserved for children and in the face of evidence of suffering children we may be moved to respond to with greater urgency than would otherwise be the case. The philosopher Henry Shue (1980; 1996), in particular, argues for 'solidarity with strangers' and shows that the well off have a duty to assist the starving. Food is a subsistence right a 'vital' (first principle) element of daily life; and together with clean air and water (and some other basic liberties) food is 'literally necessary or valuable' for human living. Shue then justifies the right to food by applying a second condition, that of 'vulnerability'. The right to food is vulnerable as it is 'subject to threats that individuals on their own often could not ward off' (Shue 1996, 114). The implementation of the right to food, therefore, requires *reciprocity* among bearers of the right, the creation of necessary social institutions and involves consideration of the interests of potential duty-bearers since such a right will need to depend on solidarity across the community for its protection.¹¹

The second set of arguments relates to the issue of complicity which basically refers to our responsibility for the actions of others. Accordingly, we do not deserve to be born into an affluent society any more than we deserve to be born into a very poor society or family. And complicity means that the inhabitants of rich countries continue to benefit from the exploitation of poorer societies where cheap labour makes possible the production of affordable products to be sold in rich countries.

The third set of issues relates to the argument that there may be some very good – indeed self-centred reasons – to assist or provide aid to other countries. Thus the moral premise in what may termed a Group Egoist argument is that we ought to do whatever helps the welfare of the people in our group. The empirical premise that follows is that helping a selection of poor countries will benefit our own country (and group) – for

example by preventing the growth of refugees from these countries to ours or ensuring political stability and peace in a poor country which may in turn help absorb the exports from our own country. The conclusion that results from the moral and empirical premises is therefore that we ought to help some of these poor countries.

Fourth, and particularly in relation to individuals in affluent countries who may feel overwhelmed with the pressure to assist strangers in distant lands, Immanuel Kant's imperfect duty argument seems most relevant.¹² Indeed, Kant distinguishes between 'perfect duties' (that require specific actions and conditions that can be met all the time, such as the duty to tell the truth) and 'imperfect duties' (that require that we perform some among a group of actions). Accordingly, some consider the duty to benevolence to be an imperfect duty, requiring us to help some of the poor and starving some of the time.

The case of food aid appears to be particularly intriguing since the intervention contains elements of a short-term emergency nature while at the same time having a major impact on long-term efforts at providing development in the recipient country. Hence, I would like to suggest that perhaps the effectiveness criterion for food aid is comparatively easy to establish. In other words, even if such assistance does not contribute to long-term economic development, it will at least save lives in the short run. And this is linked to the idea that human beings have a right not to be killed unjustifiably. Thus Onora O'Neill (1977) claims that we all have a duty to prevent and postpone starvation-related deaths, and if this duty is not undertaken then those who were in a position to help the starving must 'bear some blame for some deaths'. Only when it can be proved that our activities do not cause hunger and famine elsewhere, can we choose whom to selectively take on board our lifeboat. However, given the economically interdependent world that we live in, this is unrealistic. A combination of population control policies (keeping the future in mind), together with immediate efforts to protect the right not to be killed unjustifiably is O'Neill's advice, and she observes: 'If all persons have a right not to be killed and a corollary duty not to kill others, then we are bound to adopt pre-famine policies which ensure that famine is postponed as long as possible and is minimised (*ibid.*, 163). Another

and quite radical argument – made in the name of pursuing an overriding moral principle of equity, and which requires the equal sharing of food among the entire world’s population has been proposed by Watson (1977) in order to resolve any scarcity-related problems in the world. And although such redistribution – required by the ‘highest principles of traditional Western morality’ – leads to universal malnourishment in the long-term, it is still worthwhile pursuing this equity goal (ibid., 118). In addition to food, all other necessities of life should also be shared equally, ‘at least until everyone is adequately supplied with a humane minimum’ (ibid., 121). Watson, however, recognises that equal sharing can only be accomplished through total economic and political revolution. Sellers (1976) is more realistic and, while agreeing with Hardin about the benefits of limiting population growth and protecting the environment, he feels that there is no reason to discard older ethical beliefs, especially the intrinsic value of voluntarism and the norms of distributive justice. Thus while Hardin (1972, 253, 261) writes that ‘in nature the criterion is survival’ and that ‘injustice is preferable to total ruin’, Sellers (1976, 111) – while not questioning the importance of survival – wonders whether survival itself should replace the older ethical beliefs and be considered the supreme moral end.

A further argument – one that emphasises the rights of the malnourished peoples against those in affluent nations – and based on ideas of global justice, appears relevant. The basic idea is that the provision of food assistance as something that affluent nations not merely choose to (or are morally required to) pursue, but something that they owe to the starving, on account of past (e.g. colonial) or present forms of exploitation (e.g. unfair terms of international trade). This is very similar to some of the more recent ideas popularised by the philosopher Thomas Pogge who makes the case for viewing severe poverty as a violation of liberty rights. For example, in *World Poverty and Human Rights* (2002), he argues that despite major improvements in overall human development in various parts of the world, the number of people living in poverty has not declined since 1987. Showing that deaths arising from extreme forms of absolute poverty are by far the greatest source of human misery today, he argues that by maintaining severe poverty in the world, affluent

countries are committing the most serious of human rights violations in history. The challenge, argues Pogge, is to unambiguously contextualise the fight against poverty as a matter of global justice, since the poor are powerless within a global system of injustice. Returning to the case of food aid, the 'right to be saved from starvation' is, according to Aiken (1977), one that is derived from the more general moral right, the right to be saved from preventable death due to deprivation.¹³ However, this does not mean that this right is absolute or claimable at all times and Aiken posits three minimal conditions for the obligation to help by this general positive right. First, an epistemological condition of being aware of the sufferer's condition – intentional ignorance is reprehensible. Second, an 'ought implies can' condition, according to which one cannot be obligated to assist the starving if one does not have the means to remedy the situation. This, however, excludes 'ought if convenient' or 'ought if I feel charitable', but implies 'ought if at all possible'. Finally, the condition of 'equivalent need', according to which one cannot be obligated to save the starving if in doing so one becomes embroiled in a situation of equivalent or more extreme need than that of the sufferer.¹⁴

There are now some loud voices saying that the world cannot continue to support an uncontrollable increase in population, and argue that the best long-term solution for reducing the vulnerability of hunger and famine is birth control. For Singer, even if this were true, it does not absolve us from the responsibility of doing all one can to promote birth control and supporting organisations working on these issues. Further, we cannot ignore the fact that people are dying of starvation and we can, in the short-term, provide relief to the suffering by sending in food aid. And it would not be too unfair to make the case that all countries have a certain responsibility of feeding themselves and not merely rely on the affluent for assistance (Frankena 1977, 83–84). This responsibility is one of the obligations drawn from the notion of sovereignty and political independence. Although Frankena recognises that some form of population control policy is needed, he sees no justification for coercing the recipients of food aid into limiting procreation. Even while feeding others, one must not lose sight of the essential feature of respecting the beliefs and the liberty of those one is helping: 'We dare not take advan-

tage of their hunger to compel them to do what they do not yet believe to be right' (ibid., 84).

Finally, the 'ought implies can' position in philosophy is often used to defend inaction to world hunger, since it may be claimed that there cannot be a moral obligation to feed the world's starving if they cannot be saved in the first place on account of too many people and too little food. Aiken (1977, 92) cautions that this does not justify 'ought if convenient' or 'ought if I feel charitable'. On the contrary, this position, in reality, implies, 'ought if at all possible'. Similarly, Dower (1998, 26) is of the view that if it is not at all possible to eliminate hunger and famine, then it cannot be considered a duty to do so. Hence, 'ought' presupposes 'can'. There appears to be strong empirical support for the view that modern famines and malnutrition in the world can indeed be averted through appropriate interventions, both on the part of the state and the international community. While the complete eradication of world hunger and the threat of future famines may be unrealistic, this does not justify current inaction on our part. The quiet presence of persistent hunger which afflicts millions daily 'can' indeed be reduced and eliminated if an 'ought' condition can influence our attitude.

It will be clear from the above that I am very much in favour of actively combating chronic deprivation in general and acute deprivation such as starvation in particular. How such assistance is administered in practice and to what extent there is a combination of short and long-term oriented interventions will, of course vary. In the final sections of this essay, I will rather argue that what really warrants urgent response is not simply related to whether we should provide assistance but the fact that we should do so as early in the process of deprivation as possible. In this respect, however, we must be clear on what we mean by hunger, starvation and famine. Indeed, I will argue that the current discourse on hunger is so convoluted that it hinders the launch of short-term emergency relief operations and the effective implementation of long-term oriented policies aimed at combating undernutrition. Finally, in the last section of this essay, I will briefly look into some of the arguments forwarded by local elites I interviewed in India, Bangladesh, Uganda, Malawi and Mexico when asked regarding the responsibilities and moral obligations they pos-

sibly feel or have towards helping their fellow citizens when confronted with extreme forms of poverty that require immediate help in addition to what is provided for by the state. Such elites are most often capable of influencing policy formulation and a certain section of the educated elites do indeed campaign on behalf of the rights of the underprivileged while others may not. Hence, this group has potential that needs to be tapped.

OPERATIONALISING HUNGER

The discussion on moral obligations and food aid has highlighted the need to distinguish between various types of deprivation – long-term, medium-term and short-term. Accordingly, it is important to distinguish between acute (famine) and chronic (endemic hunger) forms of deprivation and our responses to these. Famines are sensational while chronic hunger and destitution is much more common and persistent in large parts of the developing world. Thus while famine is dramatic (and involves acute starvation followed by a sharp increase in mortality), chronic hunger entails ‘sustained nutritional deprivation on a persistent basis’ (Drèze and Sen 1989, 7). And understanding hunger as primarily in relation to the sensational impact of famines overlooks the millions who experience hunger and malnutrition for prolonged periods, but who do not die in large numbers in a particular area and at the same time. There is hence a need to question the appropriateness of current response to combat world hunger. If we accept that there are strong moral obligations to prevent famine, a further question arises. Should we focus on long-term measures to combat famine by attempting to reduce current levels of chronic hunger? In other words, it may be better to focus on policies of sustainable development – with elements of social, economic, environmental and political dimensions – in order to lessen the likelihood of short-term emergency food aid in the future. Hence, if we are indeed interested in combating sensational famines that lead to mass deaths, we ought to be more concerned with attacking the root cause of hunger itself.

Despite the frequent use of the term ‘hunger’, the term is without a proper scientific definition. It can refer to a broad range of phenomena of varying levels of severity and there is no agreement on applicable

methods of measuring it. At the most general level, hunger is a 'symptom or a sensation which is expressed as a craving for food' (Robson 1972, 2). However, this sensation or craving may result from a wide variety of causes, some voluntary and others involuntary. As Payne (1994, 86) puts it, sometimes hunger is 'a signal of desperation' while at other times it may simply be 'an expression of keen healthy appetite'. In contrast, there is large-scale agreement that 'undernutrition' (often used interchangeably with 'malnutrition'), in the strictest sense, is caused by a lack of appropriate nutrients in the food consumed by an individual and may result not only from the *quantity* of food consumed (excessive or inadequate) but also the *quality* of food intake (e.g. lack of vitamins, protein and micronutrients). At the other extreme is famine, a community crisis, which results from a general state of mass starvation caused by a decline in the food intake per capita over a prolonged period.¹⁵ In other words, when a situation of undernutrition becomes severe and continues over a considerable period of time, famine results in 'excess deaths', directly or indirectly, by the inability of vulnerable groups to acquire sufficient food to sustain life.

Unfortunately, most world attention today continues to focus on major crises like famine while ignoring the regular or chronic hunger that affects millions of people every day. Elsewhere I have argued that without distinguishing famine from related terms, it is impossible to assign institutional and political responsibility (or 'culpability') when famines or food crises causing immense suffering occur (Banik 2007). By declaring a famine, the national political leadership risks embarrassment at home and abroad and may thus be reluctant to admit to its own policy failures. And without an official declaration international agencies and voluntary organisations cannot mobilise sufficient resources or operate in a concerted manner in the famine-affected regions. In other cases, a hastily declared famine and inflation of the real magnitude of the tragedy may be a ploy to receive international sympathy and assistance and deflect subsequent criticism of the government's own policies. Similarly, aid agencies may be reluctant to use the term 'famine' in order to avoid mounting an appropriate and timely response. Moreover, unless a clearly understood and visible 'crisis' is formally declared, the international community does not appear to react immediately or generously.

TABLE 2: *A typology of famine and related terms*

Type of stress	Brief description
Undernutrition	Chronic undernutrition (poor quality and quantity of food consumed)
Severe undernutrition	Decline in the level of food consumption and high food insecurity among sections of the population
Famine threat	A condition of severe undernutrition and starvation worsens and starts affecting larger groups in the population who face destitution
Famine	Community crisis, destitution for large groups and wide-spread mortality from mass starvation and epidemics
Great famine	Catastrophic magnitude, extremely high CMR and excess mortality

THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE

Possible indicators	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High IMR and MMR - Low BMI - Food consumption well below national mean - High levels of 'mild' and 'moderate' malnutrition among children; - Stunting <20 %, Underweight <10 %, Wasting <5 % - Diarrhoea, dysentery, tuberculosis, respiratory disorders, anaemia, sparse hair, etc. 	Large parts of the developing world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in IMR and MMR - Food consumption below average local consumption levels; eating of newer types of food collected from alternative sources - Stunting 20–29 %, Underweight 10–19 %, Wasting 5–9 % - Very low BMI among adults - Increased mortality: CMR <0.5/10,000/day 	Specific regions in almost all developing countries at regular times during a year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - India (Kalahandi) - Sudan (Darfur)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critically low BMI - Stunting 30–39 %, Underweight 20–29 %, Wasting 10–15 % - Increase in CDR due to starvation and infectious disease - Increase in mortality rates (CMR \geq1 but <2/10,000/day) - Higher mortality rate for males 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - India (Bihar 1965–66, Maharashtra 1971–72) - Ethiopia (1999–00) - Mali (2004) - Niger (2005)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stunting > 40 %, Underweight > 30 %, Wasting > 15 % - CMR >2 but <15/10,000/day - Total excess mortality = < 300,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - West Africa (Sahel, 1969–74) - Somalia (1974–75) - Mozambique (1982–85) - Sudan (Darfur and Kardofan, 1984–85) - Sudan (Bahr el Ghazal, 1998)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CMR >15/10,000/day - Total excess mortality = > 300,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - India (Bengal, 1943–44) - China (1959–62) - Nigeria (Biafra, 1968–70) - Ethiopia (1983–85) - North Korea (1995–99)

IMR=Infant Mortality Rate, MMR=Maternal Mortality Rate, BMI=Body Mass Index, CMR= Crude Mortality Rate (Source: Banik 2007, 32)

It is imperative therefore to clearly operationalise hunger since the terms ‘malnutrition’, ‘undernutrition’, ‘starvation deaths’ and ‘famine’ are frequently used interchangeably, causing much confusion among academics, policymakers and practitioners. A clarification on such conceptual issues is of urgent importance for the purposes of early warning, diagnosis and timely response to food crises. In this quest, I believe it would be useful to operate with a fivefold typology of operational definitions (see table 2) that provides an overview of the following conditions/phases in the hunger chain: ‘undernutrition’, ‘severe undernutrition’, ‘famine threat’, ‘famine’ and ‘great famine’. The main purpose of undertaking this task is to encourage more accurate diagnoses and quicker and more efficient responses. Such an understanding also helps us to view famines as the end result of a long process starting with chronic undernutrition and gradually assuming more acute dimensions. It is hence possible for national and international agencies to react as early as possible and prevent further escalation of the problem. Famines and ‘famine threats’ can be avoided if authorities are made aware of the seriousness of chronic and severe undernutrition and the urgency with which these problems need to be addressed. And they can be held accountable for their failure to react at an earlier stage if a stage of famine is reached.

The task of reaching consensus on such operational criteria is, however, fraught with difficulty. For example, the proposed cut-off points will invariably be contentious and, although the exact composition of various indicators should be arrived at through consensus and dialogue involving all affected parties (including nutritionists, medical practitioners, relief workers, residents of famine-prone areas, etc.), it may be immensely difficult to organise such meetings in practice. But this is also where some countries – for example Scandinavian countries, for whom poverty reduction is the sole overarching goal of development assistance – may potentially play a major role by facilitating and encouraging politicians, administrators, NGOs and international agencies to agree on a platform for correctly diagnosing the problem and thereafter ensuring that a developing crisis is remedied at an early stage. This will contribute to strengthening the overall international crisis response system.

When triggered by war or natural disasters, those already hungry (not in immediate danger of dying) are suddenly pushed to the brink of mass starvation. This makes the newspaper headlines and there is a tendency on the part of the government and donor agencies to set into motion emergency operations. However, the signs of undernutrition are usually relatively clear for a long time before deaths occur, but political and administrative authorities may seldom react early to prevent a crisis from occurring. Elsewhere I have discussed drought relief in India (Banik 2007) and the politics of, and strategies underlying, the official declaration of a 'crisis'. In many instances – especially drought-induced distress – a crisis is seldom declared with the result that administrative response is inadequate. In contrast, the sensational devastation caused by a flood usually results in the declaration of a crisis, and the administrative response, for the major part, is quite impressive. As important as it may be, food is only one aspect of protecting, restoring and promoting nutritional well-being. Other measures, like access to health care, education, safe drinking water, health services, hygienic sanitation, etc. need to be implemented for purposes of securing overall well-being. Many deaths often occur not directly due to lack of food, but due to disease and other social problems like migration and crime that is associated with food scarcity and malnutrition. Hence, the most pressing issue at hand is to accord primary importance to the issue of reducing chronic hunger and encouraging long-term development efforts that focus on reducing people's vulnerability to famine. By doing so, we would also be in a position to avoid some of the dilemmas relating to the provision of emergency food assistance.

LOCAL ELITES AND LOCAL DEPRIVATION

I have so far discussed the role of global responsibility and the moral obligations of rendering assistance to those starving in various parts of the world. A major difficulty associated with these obligations is that those suffering and desperately in need of assistance are mostly to be found in countries and areas very distant from industrialised countries. It may be difficult to convince large sections of the population in afflu-

ent countries of the magnitude of deprivation in distant lands. Indeed, it may well be odd to insist on providing assistance to ‘strangers’ when there are many groups within such affluent societies that are in need to assistance. One also often hears of arguments that insist that monetary assistance provided through voluntary organisations and other agencies do not make much of an impact due to overly high administrative costs and corruption. These are important issues to tackle and I will try to illustrate some of these problems in this final section of the essay.

Even though national and regional level elites are the most powerful – responsible for fundamental socio-economic and political decisions – my focus here is primarily on the local level, including district (regions or other administrative categories) and village levels. By ‘elite’, I refer to local notables who have a common historical association or commonality and belong to the dominating sections of society for generations. Although this group includes both educated and non-educated persons, what is common is that they have greater financial resources and decision-making powers than others in local society. Such elites are a heterogeneous bunch and may include agrarian elites (groups who derive status and income by their control of large landholdings), belong to certain ethnic groups that are considered superior, richer or more ‘noble’ than others (e.g. high castes in India), but also more generally businessmen, traders, cultural personalities (poets, writers, stage performers, journalists), religious leaders, elected or nominated leaders, educators, medical personnel (doctors and nurses), law and order personnel (policemen and judges), civil servants/administrators (officers often locally posted, but belonging to other regions), etc.

Further down, at the village level, local elites include petty traders, representatives of local government, village chiefs and elders, block-level extension workers (salaried government employees in the sectors of health, agriculture, education, etc.), school teachers (particularly those receiving government salaries on a regular basis) and local agrarian elites (large farmers and landowners who employ others, mainly landless labourers, to cultivate their land). Common for such elites is that they have relatively steady incomes either from fixed salaries and/or agricultural revenue. It is also most often easy to recognise them in terms of their

physical appearance (obesity is much more prevalent among the well-off), the clothes and shoes they wear, the dialect they speak, the forms of transport they use and the generally better standards of their houses.

In the following sections, I will identify several types or categories of challenges that local elites in India, Bangladesh, Uganda and Malawi and Mexico are confronted with, particularly with regard to acute deprivation. These challenges both hinder as well as encourage them to extend a helping hand. However, I find the general norm, reflecting largely a libertarian position, is for local elites not to take on direct responsibility for dealing with deprivation. Why is this so? In the following I will discuss a set of possible explanations.

SOCIAL ROLES AND THE NEED FOR ACHIEVEMENT, SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY

By social roles I refer to patterns of behaviour expected of persons when they occupy social positions, in this case, elite positions in local society. Social roles develop in a complex and cumulative process over a prolonged period of time. Disadvantaged groups often suffer because their access to certain positions is restricted by outmoded customs, ignorance and prejudice. Hence, there is great pressure upon elites to succeed and maintain the level of success throughout generations. A very common phrase I hear is the importance of maintaining 'the wall that separates the haves from the have nots'. As a local landowner in a village on the fringes of Dhaka put it, 'My wealth is only of importance since no one else in the village has it'. Similarly, a village elder in a village in Southern Malawi, who also happened to be affiliated with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), observed that he derived great pleasure from the influence he exercised in village politics and that he would not have had the backing of a major political party had it not been for the relatively successful fertiliser distributorship he and his family members ran. It is indeed quite common for local elites to compare their positions with others who have far less, which then in turn accentuates their sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Elites, unlike other social groups, feel an immense pressure to sustain their achievement, and many expressed concern over the social costs of

failure. I noticed this trend particularly among so-called 'native elites' in India, i.e. large farmers, landowners and traders rather than 'immigrant elites' like civil servants and journalists from other parts of the region or country, who enjoy greater professional mobility as they are normally transferred to another post/area after a few years. However, common for both native and immigrant elite groups is that they may also feel threatened if deprivation is all too successfully combated. The question is whether the elites themselves want genuine and far-reaching improvements in the lives of the poor. In many instances, it is actually in local elite interests to maintain the status quo or see to it that conditions deteriorate further since traders, moneylenders and large farmers often make their small fortunes based on exploitative practices. These groups then stand to lose substantial benefits and profit incentives if deprivation is reduced drastically.

A good case in point is that of famine. Several authors, including Rangasami (1985) and Keen (1994), have argued that famines can actually be beneficial to certain groups in society. These groups consequently have an interest in preventing effective famine relief. For example by withholding famine relief the price of grain increases and during the Irish famine (1845–50), lobbying by grain merchants had a great impact on the British decision to not import food. Similarly grain merchants in Malawi lobbied against famine relief in 1949 (*ibid.*, 7). Indeed this is also the case in many parts of Malawi and India today, particularly in drought-prone areas which face recurrent food shortages and where local moneylenders play a crucial role in the seasonal coping strategies of the drought-affected population. Similar tendencies are often seen in rural Bangladesh with the increasing vulnerability of the poor to periodic cyclones and floods. Charging exorbitant interest rates, moneylenders rely on widespread deprivation in order to consolidate their social standing and to improve their own (comparatively) higher living standards. Given the limited ability of the government to provide drought relief to the masses due to a shortage of funds, personnel, and equipment, the poor increasingly rely on moneylenders to survive despite being aware of the fact that they are being exploited. Another instance of local elites 'using' human deprivation to promote their own interests was that of a

handful of local journalists who may exaggerate stories or wrongly file sensational reports (e.g. on child-sale, prostitution, forced migration and alleged starvation deaths) not only to boost the circulation rates of their publications but also to become somewhat indispensable to their editors who are based faraway in major urban centres. Such reports are therefore quite common in major Ugandan and Malawian dailies and at regional and district level publications in India.

ETHNIC CONSIDERATIONS, HISTORICAL PREJUDICES AND SOCIAL STIGMA

Childhood memories of impoverishment and violence and exploitation by other (majority) groups in society often tend to make elites from minority groups or lower castes and classes less interested in the plight of the poor in general. Hence, 'self-made' individuals may on occasion wish to hide or play down their ethnic and/or religious identities and wish to be judged in terms of their economic success. As one local businessman dealing in timber in Orissa (India) remarked, 'We did it the hard way; others should do the same ... When I needed help, no one came forward; therefore I do not need to help others either'. The message that he, like many other relatively successful locals, would like to communicate is that the poor have to take greater control of their destinies. And such arguments are further justified by the statements such as: 'We also need to survive'; 'I am earning my living in an honest way and through hard work ... It is not my fault that others are ignorant or plain lazy'.

Even when local elites feel it is a moral requirement for them to help the deprived, they find it difficult to carry out the act of giving assistance. This may for example occur when elites wish to apply a moral principle but another principle seems to conflict – social stigma. A wide range of personal characteristics distinguish persons who are different from others in an 'undesirable' way. This often involves personal and social characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion or nationality if it is negatively valued by society in which they live (e.g. prostitutes, tribal groups, 'untouchables', entire communities branded as thieves, refugees from a neighbouring country). Elites are afraid of social stigma in case they are observed to closely associate with these groups, which in turn could af-

fect their social standing and have adverse affects on family honour. This is also where personal and group values, attitudes and religious beliefs appear significant. For example, in a remote village in West Bengal (India), two tribal communities (*Santhals* and *Sabars*) live in separate village zones. In the period leading up to my visit to the village, locals had reported several cases of destitution and suicide in the *Sabar* community, one of the hardest-hit by a series of recurrent drought episodes. The village headman, belonging to a relatively wealthy Santhal family, expressed his inability to provide 'adequate assistance' to the Sabar community as they were seen by the Santhals to be 'tricksters' and 'thieves'. He went on to argue that assisting them would be tantamount to 'playing with fire', implying that he would be ostracised by his own community.

FUTURE UNCERTAINTIES, INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND SOCIAL DUTIES

Local elites are largely anxious about future uncertainties like weather conditions, crop failures, rise in prices, shortage of essential commodities, children's education, marriage dowries, etc. It thus becomes very important for them, just as others, to save for the future to protect themselves and their families (immediate as well as extended) against future uncertainties. Consequently, the uncertainty factor is often used to justify inaction. Thus, in Malawi and Uganda, countries ravaged by the AIDS epidemic, it has become increasingly common for better-off individuals and households to assume responsibility for the education and well-being of children whose parents have died. There is hence a feeling of added responsibility, i.e. in addition to one's own family; elites feel the pressure to have enough resources to cater to the needs of extended family members. It is therefore common in most parts of the developing world to hear individuals espouse the inherent value of adhering to the 'survival of the fittest' principal while others express worry over what fate has in store for them. Common for most elites is the fear of losing their privileged positions that they have either inherited or acquired through 'sheer hard work'. Interestingly, the role of luck is seldom mentioned for positive accomplishments; rather luck is inherently 'bad' and is often used to describe future uncertainties in case of such 'bad luck'. Neither

is the exploitative process by which such wealth is gained commonly mentioned.

A group of traders, journalists and editors in rural India, who had formed their own 'voluntary and charitable organisation' – that provided free schooling to poor children – actively echoed Libertarian-like notions of 'Give if possible, but not if it hurts you'. The argument here was that all individuals had their respective responsibilities to their family, relatives, employees, etc. If providing assistance to combat local human deprivation was to take place at the cost of the wellbeing of loved ones, then it was better to abstain from taking on added responsibility for the underprivileged. Thus local elites in Indian and Bangladeshi districts and villages mainly emphasise that combating deprivation often exposes them to unnecessary risks and thereby 'hurts' their future prospects.

Elites, like all others, are sometimes confronted with situations where they are unsure of what constitutes the right course of action. This occurs especially when they possess certain moral principles, but have difficulty in applying them either because the principles are inadequate and/or because they clash with other important and competing sets of principles. In other cases, elites actually think they have arrived at a moral decision only to discover that carrying it out may be unpleasant and/or problematic. All this contributes to a feeling of uncertainty and they may not know how best to react and respond to hundreds of starving faces who harbour expectations of receiving some form of assistance.

Local elites are sometimes unclear about what constitutes a 'right' or what is meant by a 'human right' and are consequently unsure what moral principles and responses to adopt. For example, relatively well-off local traders in Malawi and India – while interested in projecting themselves as influential leaders of society – are nonetheless perplexed by the language of rights. Thus while they expressed the need for acts of charity, they appeared unsure what a 'right to food' entailed in practice and in terms of corresponding duties. One trader, echoing a representative attitude for many elite groups in rural India, asked, 'Does it mean that we have an obligation to feed a particularly hungry person, or to feed a large share of the region's hungry?' He went on to argue that the 'sheer volume of deprived peoples' in his region meant that realising

elite responsibility was so complex that it was better not to waste time having a 'guilty conscience'. These then are cases when individuals may possess the requisite moral principle but may not know how to apply it. It is, of course, interesting that such confusion usually comes about with regard to the rights of *others* and less often with regard to their *own* rights. This illustrates the common distinction elites adopt when giving primary importance to the protection of negative rights in contrast to the promotion of positive welfare rights of others. For example, the same group of traders who (above) expressed confusion over deprived persons' right to food appeared to be very aware of their own rights related to property, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.

Hence, it turns out that elites are usually aware of pressing economic needs affecting large sections of local society and yet choose not to intervene either because they do not wish to or because they are unsure of the magnitude of their 'duties'. In principle, however, elites do not go out of their way to prevent others from lending a helping hand. Indeed, as a wealthy contractor in India pointed out: those 'feeling bad for the poor' were welcome to 'undertake some schemes for poverty alleviation instead of sending the rest of us on a guilt trip'. Thus the libertarian position of there not being any duty to help others irrespective of relations within societies or relations among nations in the world appears well entrenched among elites in many developing countries.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS

An overwhelming majority of elites argue that the government is the main agency with the duty to promote and protect positive welfare rights. Interestingly, however, the libertarian notion of a minimalist state takes a beating as a large majority of local elites I interviewed in India support an active intervention by the government in relation to economic development and so-called 'upliftment' of the poor. Indeed, in both Africa and Asia, the state is seen to have the primary responsibility and the justification is provided by arguments such as, 'We pay taxes', 'the state coffers are full, what are they doing with all the money?' and 'thousands are starving while foodgrains rot in government storage houses'. This contrasts greatly with my experience in Mexico, where support for libertarianism

appeared stronger and the state was generally expected to play a much lesser role in poverty reduction. I was actually quite struck by the general political climate and attitude of many elites in Mexico who forcefully tended to disagree that the state had special duties to specifically address poverty. And an influential Supreme Court justice claimed that such attitudes explained why there were so few public interest litigation cases on social, economic and cultural rights in Mexico as compared to say countries like South Africa and India.¹⁶ Indeed, the failure of the state – where authority holders like politicians and bureaucrats were seen to be corrupt, incompetent or lacked sustained political and administrative commitment – can also be used to justify individual inaction. In India, a local businessman who had made a small fortune in the brick-making business in rural Orissa state argued, ‘What’s the point? I know this society ... Everything and everyone is corrupt ... My efforts will be in vain ... It is no use. This is the single most important reason for my unwillingness to contribute to government coffers’.

Particularly from government officials, it is common to hear the view that ‘The government cannot always help; others should’. Thus district level officials in India claimed that they were ‘tired of taking the blame whenever bad news like starvation deaths and the incidence of alleged epidemics emerged from the district’ and were keen on focusing on the moral responsibilities of locals and fellow villagers. The argument was that much suffering – and in many cases even death – could be prevented if fellow villagers and relatives provided assistance to the victim first, before contacting government officials for assistance. A high ranking official in an Indian district argued: ‘There can never be an entire area or a village without any food. This is practically quite difficult. The main problem is that neighbours and family members or relatives do not react and sometimes fail to respond’.

Another set of arguments related to the ignorance of the local population and the role of superstition in local culture which prevented locals from making proper use of government facilities. While some district officials in India were willing to admit administrative shortcomings in managing drought-induced distress and destitution affecting traditionally vulnerable groups, many such officials together with a section of

other local elites felt that on numerous instances villagers had themselves to blame for malnutrition, disease and starvation. They argued that the problem was that many tribal groups were illiterate, ignorant and did not understand and/or make use of facilities provided for them by government programmes such as healthcare centres and ration shops for subsidised food. Several officials also argued that tribal populations were obsessed with superstition and often preferred to be treated by quacks and witch doctors rather than qualified medical practitioners. Indeed, in many of the villages I visited in the late 1990s while studying starvation deaths, I often found truth in such allegations. There was, in most remote and tribal-dominated villages, an excessive dependence on the miraculous powers of the traditional healer/medicine man who prepared herbal medicines, often pastes made of local herbs and plants. These healers appeared to have a wide repertoire of remedies for curing a wide body of illnesses and enjoyed high respect in village society. Respect, however, seldom materialised into improved healthcare. Nonetheless, the issue that officials seldom appear to address is the extent to which government programmes actually are geared towards promoting education among such groups of people and thereby creating an awareness of the benefits of development in general and modern healthcare advice in particular.

An argument often heard in Malawi and Uganda – and as discussed in chapter 2 – relates to the role of the ever-increasing number of NGOs mushrooming all over the region, many of which are actually established and run by regional and local elites. While most accept that NGOs can play an important role to supplement state activities in the sphere of development, there are a growing number of voices – mainly from media persons and academics – that are highly critical of NGO activity. The scepticism is partially grounded in the belief that NGOs are very similar to government agencies in that they are ineffective, do not possess required expertise, are prone to mismanagement of funds and revel in inter-organisational rivalry. It is also frequently claimed that NGOs often start programmes targeted towards improving one area of development (e.g. nutrition or health) that are not only poorly conceived but also never completed on time, leading to wastage of precious resources that Western donors have earmarked for development in the country. And

NGO personnel, when confronted with the above statements, tend to either be entirely dismissive or argue that the same allegations could just as well be directed at government agencies and local bureaucrats.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I started this essay by emphasising the need to re-focus efforts on the problem of radical inequalities between and within societies. It is true that national and international institutions have the primary responsibility to combat deprivation, since they take important economic decisions on a regular basis. But we also need to understand the mindsets of individuals in affluent countries and affluent individuals in poor countries. Poverty and inequality result not only from the economic and political relations between nations but also from the relationship between affluent local elites and the poor within developing countries. In this context, I have tried to highlight the moral obligation to assist those suffering from acute deprivation in various parts of the world. The starting point was what I perceive to be a growing questioning of the basis of providing aid to others, particularly given the current political and economic scenario where support for development aid may not be as strong as it used to be. And in the first part of this essay, I undertook a brief examination of the major schools of thought with regard to food aid. It appears that if Hardin could be convinced that aid would 'pay off', then he would be a strong advocate of aid, and that if Singer could be convinced that Hardin's bleak scenarios were true, that Singer would also say, 'Let them starve'. However, that is not the end of the matter as both Singer and Hardin embrace other moral views that incline them to reach the conclusions they reach. Hence, their disagreements are not merely empirical disagreements about the effects of aid but relate to the more fundamental issue of the sharing ethic. I think there is good reason to doubt the effectiveness of food aid in many situations. Timely declaration of a crisis (and admitting the failure of anti-hunger policy), with the help of 'early warning' indicators (e.g. related to nutrition, rise in food prices, child mortality, etc.) can indeed prevent a bad situation from turning worse. It is simultaneously important to make vulnerable

groups more demanding and aware of their rights – for instance, the right to be saved from starvation – such that they are not only able to demand a greater share of the officially sanctioned resources but can also actively and regularly participate in, and exercise greater influence over, policy formulation and implementation. More concretely, I have suggested that we need to clearly distinguish between sensational famines that result in large-scale loss of lives on the one hand and related terms such as undernutrition, starvation and famine threats on the other. Such an understanding allows for the understanding of famines as the end result of a long process. Hence, if the problem is properly diagnosed, national and international agencies should be able to react as early as possible and prevent further escalation of the problem. Indeed, famines and ‘famine threats’ can be avoided if political and administrative authorities can be held to account for their failure to react at an earlier phase, if a stage of famine is reached.

There are indeed many individuals in both developed and developing countries that are genuinely distressed over the nature and extent of deprivation that engulfs the poor. And many in rich countries do actually make valuable contributions in some form or another – be it in the form of monetary contributions to voluntary and relief organisations or by putting pressure on their own governments to make available funds for urgent and more effective relief. At local levels, I have seen civil servants and journalists, for example, assuming some responsibility for tackling local deprivation by establishing, supporting and sometimes even managing the daily activities of charitable organisations and providing assistance in kind (food, clothes, building materials, etc.). Other groups may take the initiative to provide loans at nominal interest rates or without interest, postpone the collection of loans, etc. However, and when such assistance is forthcoming, it usually comes in the form of charity. Thus this is in essence a continuation of the traditional distinction between duty and charity – an issue Peter Singer warns should not be supported – whereby providing assistance is seen to be a charitable act that is the subject of praise, but by not helping, a person does not do anything wrong and is not condemned by others in society. The crucial point here is that voluntary charity has traditionally been the major instrument of

redistribution within most countries and I believe consequentialists are right in observing that charity does not provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of human deprivation. Indeed, as Balakrishnan and Narayan (1996) argue, voluntary charity is not threatening to those asked to give, for two reasons. First, those providing assistance decide how much they are willing to 'sacrifice' and when their sacrifices have reached the point where they are no longer required. In other words, charitable acts do not have an air of sustainability about them and thus cannot be taken for granted. It is purely dependent on the personal whims of the giver. Second, and most importantly, the act of voluntary charity does not lead to a questioning of the basic entitlement to what the givers are donating. Thus there is little or no challenge to the process by which affluent individuals, be they in rich or poor countries, are able to legitimise their properties and wealth. This only leads to a perpetuation of already existing and radical economic inequality. And as discussed in chapter 2, while examining the concept of elusive development, any reduction of inequality will rest largely on a critical examination of political and economic institutions. It is for these reasons that charity in most developing countries must give way to radical redistributive programmes well-targeted at the poor and vulnerable sections of society. The term 'charity' simply urges well-off sections of society to assist with some of their riches whenever fellow citizens or others in distant lands are in severe need. It is precisely for these reasons that local elites in Malawi or India appear especially willing to donate to the victims of flood and cyclones. It is easier to be charitable during such crises where suffering is clearly visible. However, drought-induced deprivation, which is a recurrent phenomenon in both countries, typically occurs over a prolonged period and is not as visible or declared as crises like flood and cyclones. In such times, even the occasional charitable act is far from sufficient to combat deprivation.

The above discussion further demonstrates that it is generally difficult to gauge to what extent local elites are pro-poor. From my material, I conclude that agrarian and other 'private-sector' elites including traders appear less eager to lend a helping hand to the poor. This is largely because any radical improvement in the living conditions of the poor

will most likely have a major impact on the income and well-being of these groups. In contrast, 'public-sector' elites like civil servants, medical personnel and journalists may express more solidarity with the poor and downtrodden. This group is also more likely to hold pro-poor views and generally advocate rapid empowerment of the local population together with better targeting of government services.

It seems relatively clear that from a moral standpoint local elites do have responsibilities to combat deprivation. However, how can one justify such responsibilities? Based on the discussion so far several explanations appear plausible. One can conclude that it is easier for local elites to assist since they are closer to those in need and can provide immediate and timely assistance. However, although this generally may be true, it is almost certainly not always so. One can then claim that local elites are wealthy (relative to the local population) and should therefore share some of their wealth with the deprived. However, others elsewhere may be as, if not more, wealthy. Hence, one would be justified in questioning why affluent 'outsiders' and 'foreigners' do not have more responsibility. Nonetheless, if we agree that radical inequalities in local society are one of the major explanations for the creation and continuance of human deprivation, then one can place additional emphasis on the proximity factor and thereby argue for enhanced moral responsibility of local elites. In addition, one can also argue that local elites can be identified as being part of the region or country. Local elites not only enjoy the right to vote, but also exercise considerable influence in framing socio-economic policy that affects the entire region. They are thus in a position to directly change the structures within the country, an ability that 'outsiders' and 'foreigners' lack. Finally, one can conclude that local elites have a heightened responsibility towards providing humanitarian assistance primarily because they are part of the same community or nation. Indeed, I observed instances in Malawi, Bangladesh, Uganda and India of assistance being provided to the poor simply because well-off villagers did not want their village to get a bad reputation. This had quite a lot to do with status and respect and elites were worried that they would be disgraced if they did not extend a helping hand to members of their clan or tribe suffering from severe deprivation.

THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE

Finally, I have tried to show that charity as the main form of assistance by individuals in developed and developing countries, while important, is highly inadequate. The real challenge lies in convincing individuals all over the world to take on added responsibility for reducing human deprivation. From a moral philosophical standpoint, neither Consequentialism nor Libertarianism provides convincing alternatives to be adopted alone. The difficulty with Consequentialism is with its emphasis on 'heroic sacrifice' and 'nothing but the best will do'. Similarly, it appears quite strange that while the Libertarian position accepts that killing a human person is morally wrong, it insists at the same time that one is perfectly within one's rights to refuse assistance to the deprived even if this would result in death. The role of the state and NGOs acting alone has already been highlighted. It is now vital to forge a system of shared responsibility between state and society, with added responsibilities for local elites. Added responsibilities for local elites, however, do not lessen the moral obligation and responsibilities of well-off foreigners in distant lands or for that matter national and regional elites. These groups must ensure that their governments meet their responsibilities in relation to rights related to, among others, adequate nutrition and health, both at home and abroad. In the final analysis moral obligations to combat poverty and deprivation are really matters of justice.

NOTES

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Figures are from the World Development Report 2010 (World Bank 2009 a&b).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Kevin Watkins from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) quoted in 'African child deaths could reach 5 million by 2015, warns UNDP expert in Berlin forum', 09 June 2005, <http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2005/june/african-child-deaths-20050609.en;jsessionid=a6XlYesyB8L8?categoryID=349423> (accessed: 02 January 2009).
2. Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus (1991, 321).
3. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20153855-menuPK:373757-pagePK:148956-piPK:216618-theSitePK:336992,00.html> (accessed: 22 November 2009).
4. Ibid.
5. Consider the following quotes: 'The rich man's "duty", such as it is, is not to society but to his art, and his art is making money', Michael Lewis in *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, July 1995; 'Money's just a way of keeping score. It's the game that matters', H. L. Hunt, cited in Jaher (1980, 215); 'The one with the most toys when he dies, wins', Anonymous (cited in Carroll 1998).
6. Cited in Jaher (1980, 215).
7. I am grateful to Jean-Pascal Daloz for discussions on this issue.
8. *Jantelov* is a term that describes attitudes towards individuality and success that is believed to be common in Scandinavia. The term is based on the novel *A Fugitive Crosses his Tracks* by the Norwegian/Danish author Aksel Sandemose.
9. World Bank (2002), cited in Pfeiffer (2004, 359).
10. Cited in Borchgrevink (2006a, 259).
11. Similarly, in a study of NGOs in Nicaragua, Borchgrevink (2006b) found that the approximately sixty organisations in 1990 had increased tenfold in 1997.
12. See Borchgrevink (2006a) and Tvedt (1998) for details on the radical increase in aid from Norway that was channelled through CSOs in the period 1981–1991.
13. Cited in Pfeiffer (2004, 361).
14. Cited in Pfeiffer (2004, 361).
15. Cited in Jewell (2007).
16. World Bank (2008) *Weathering the Storm: Economic Policy Responses to the Financial Crisis*,

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- <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/NEWS/Resources/weatheringstorm.pdf> (accessed: 16 February 2009).
17. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2009/NEW032409A.htm> (accessed: 16 February 2009).
 18. See 'The Perils of Autocracy', *The Economist*, 11 June 2009.
 19. <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/wfs-faq/en/> (accessed: 26 July 2009).
 20. Estimates based on World Bank figures in the Call for Proposals (FY 2010) from the Norwegian-Finnish Trust Fund on Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (TFESSD), www.worldbank.org/tfessd.
 21. <http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2008/1000866/index.html> (accessed: 26 July 2009).
 22. 'A catastrophe is looming', *The Economist*, 26 September 2009.
 23. Cited in Kamanou and Morduch (2002, 1).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. For detailed studies on rent-seeking behaviour, see Tullock (1967), Krueger (1974), Posner (1975), Bhagwati (1982), Tollison (1982) and Mbaku (1992).
2. Cited in Pavarala (1996, 52).
3. Cited in Heidenheimer et al. (1989, 54).
4. Løkkevik (2001) examines how the definition and understanding of corruption varies between Norway and Nicaragua, and the possible effects this has on bilateral foreign aid.
5. Cited in Bardhan (1997, 1322).
6. Cited in Bardhan (1997, 1323).
7. Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister of India in the period 1984–1989. 'Crore' is the Indian term for 10 million; 100 paisa = 1 Indian Rupee.
8. 'Corruption Fighters Rouse Resistance in Indonesia', *The New York Times*, 26 July 2009.
9. I am grateful to Francesco Kjellberg for stimulating discussions on this issue.
10. 'In Mexican Vote, Nostalgia for Past Corruption', *The New York Times*, 07 July 2009.
11. Name changed.
12. 'Babu' is an affix that signifies respect among Bengalis.
13. Oldenburg (1987), in a study of the role of middlemen in the land consolidation programme in Uttar Pradesh state of India, concludes that the middleman often has a vested interest in giving the impression that corruption is all-pervasive and that without his intervention, nothing will get done.
14. In this essay, I am primarily concerned with the transfers of IAS officers who normally hold important posts in the public sector. Transfer policies in the early 1980s laid down norms calling for positions of three years normally at the State level for IAS officers. For details, see Potter (1996a; 1996b) and Banik (2001). Although the phenomenon of rapid transfers is widespread, the rate and volume of transfers varies between Indian States. The crucial determinant seems to be political culture and the nature of the political leadership in place. While transfer policies in the early 1980s specified positions of three years' duration at the State level, in reality, very few IAS officers hold their posts continuously for a period of two years or more.
15. Former Home Secretary N. N. Vohra, quoted in 'Is fixed tenure the answer?' *The Hindustan Times*, 21 March 1999.
16. Former Cabinet Secretary, T. S. R. Subramaniam observed, 'Children's education suffers. After three transfers and school re-admissions, the officer's wife asks, "Are you an idiot?" Then he decides to bend, duck and deflect' (quoted in Ramachandran 1999).
17. Note sent by the Union Secretary, Department of Personnel, Government of India, to all State governments in September 1997 (*The Indian Express*, 23 November 1997).
18. Profitability, according to Wade (1982, 302–303), is only one factor determining

desirability of posts. Other main determinants of desirability seem to be the following: 'how much money can be raised, which is a function of how much money is being spent through the post', and how much can be raised from clients; 'how safely the money can be raised'; living conditions (most officers prefer urban areas, English language schools for children, etc.); 'prestige of the project'; and 'nearness to native place'.

19. An officer told me that he often counted on several trustworthy junior level officials, whom he referred to as his 'Man Fridays', to assist him in running the district.
20. For a very detailed overview of the process leading to the UNCAC, see Webb (2005).
21. 'Zambia's Chiluba Guilty of Graft', BBC News, 04 May 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6624547.stm> (accessed: 01 June 2007). However, with a new President in place following the death of his predecessor (Levy Mwanawasa), all charges against Mr. Chiluba were subsequently dropped in Zambia.
22. Quoted in Bayley (1966).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. For further details on methodological challenges, see Varshney (1999).
2. Cited in Bardhan (1999).
3. Cited in Bardhan (1999).
4. Author's emphasis in italics. In addition to minimalist and liberal democracies, Diamond (1996, 28) identifies a third regime category – pseudodemocracies – which have 'legal opposition parties and perhaps many other constitutional features of electoral democracy, but fail to meet one of its crucial requirements: a sufficiently fair arena of contestation to allow the ruling party to be turned out of power'. Pseudodemocracies can be differentiated from authoritarian regimes in that 'they tolerate the existence of independent opposition parties' as has been the experience in Jordan, Morocco and Mexico (*ibid.*).
5. 'Contestation' in this context refers to a situation when the political opposition has some chance of winning the elections.
6. 'Contestation' further entails three features: ex-ante uncertainty ('some positive probability that at least one member of the incumbent coalition will lose in a particular round of election'), ex-post irreversibility ('outcomes of elections must be irreversible under democracy even if the opposition wins') and repeatability ('Losers do not forfeit the right to compete in the future, to negotiate again, to influence legislation, to pressure the bureaucracy, or to seek recourse to courts') (Przeworski et al. 2000, 16–18).
7. Cited in Saward (1994).
8. Cited in Saward (1994).
9. These include civil liberties (rights of the individual against the state) and political rights (legal rights determining the laws of the community and who governs). The two kinds of rights are interdependent: civil liberties without political rights are apt to be lost, and political rights without civil liberties are rather meaningless. Belonging to the so-called first generation of human rights, these are set forth in Articles 2–21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and include: freedom from racial and equivalent forms of discrimination; the right to life, liberty, and the security of the person; the right to a fair and public trial; freedom of movement and residence; the right to asylum from persecution; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of peaceful assembly and association; the right to participate in government, directly or through free elections, etc.
10. Inherent in each threshold is the possibility of crisis and reversal, given that dominant elites are threatened by impending change, which would serve to constrain their actions and place limits on their access to public goods. Thus implicit in the formulation is the

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- requirement for each successive threshold to be consummated in order to protect the values associated with the previous thresholds.
11. The implication is that the mere incapacity to attain a goal does not constitute a lack of freedom. For instance, at the core of liberalism is the view that people are free only when they are not subject to constraint by others. For Locke, liberty meant 'to be free from restraint and violence from others' (Locke 1982, Section. 57). Similarly, Hobbes writes, 'liberty, or freedom, signifieth, properly, the absence of opposition; by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion'. Hobbes goes on to note that liberty 'consistieth in this, that he finds no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire and inclination to do' (Hobbes 1962, 159). John Stuart Mill sees freedom in negative terms and argues that the only justification for interference with negative liberty is self-protection (Mill, quoted in Milne 1968, 17).
 12. Cohen (1981) and Lukes (1985) have argued (albeit controversially) that radicals like Marx adhere to a negative concept of freedom, while others like Sen (1987a) feel Marx expounds the positive view. Radicals themselves reject the separate identification of negative and positive freedom. They see the two types as being bounded together, thereby creating a new unique category (Brenkert 1991, 105).
 13. See Banik (1997) for a critique of Berlin's distinction.
 14. The Presidential Commission on World Hunger (1980) established by Jimmy Carter, quoted in Alston (1984, 162).
 15. This follows Beetham (1999, 2) who argues that one of the most common mistakes in defining democracy involves confusing 'the question of the definition of democracy with the separate question of whether it is a good, or how much of it is a good'.
 16. Cited in Clague et al. (2001, 36).
 17. This and some ensuing sections build on Banik (2004; 2006) and have benefited from discussions with Professor Atul Kohli from Princeton University.
 18. Bhagwati (1997, 264–265) has subsequently changed his mind and admits that he was wrong. Rather, he argues that democracy and development are very much compatible.
 19. For a critical review of this debate, see Sen (1997).
 20. Cited in Przeworski and Limongi (1993, 57).
 21. For a critique of Sen's argument, see Banik (2007).
 22. 'Economic Scene; Democracy has the edge when it comes to advancing economic growth', *The New York Times*, 13 April 2000.
 23. For an overview of the election process and results, see 'A Damned Close-Run Thing – And a Fine Example to the Rest of Africa', *The Economist*, 10 January 2009.
 24. Quoted in 'Ballot Boxes? Yes. Actual Democracy? Tough Question', *The New York Times*, 07 June 2007.
 25. Editorial in *The Guardian*, a national Nigerian daily, quoted in 'Nigeria Frets over How to Give Voters a Real Say', *The New York Times*, 20 April 2007.
 26. A look at development indicators in UNDP's latest Human Development Report (2009) shows that China leads India on vital indicators such as: life-expectancy at birth, child mortality, adult literacy, access to health services and sanitation, etc.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. For a detailed overview of these principles, see OHCHR (2004), Darrow and Tomas (2005) and OHCHR (2006).
2. Cited in Hansen and Sano (2006, 44).
3. Cited in Alston (2005, 799).
4. E-mail correspondence in a UNDP-facilitated Internet debate on the linkage between human rights and the Millennium Development Goals, 5 May 2006.

5. Cited in Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall (2004, 6).
6. This section is based on two visits to Malawi in the period September–October 2006 and February–March 2007. All interviews have been anonymised. This section also builds heavily on Banik (2010).
7. Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, available at <http://www.sdn.org.mw/constitut/dtlinx.html> (accessed: 13 February 2009).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. See <http://www.unep.org/climatechange/Introduction/tabid/233/language/en-US/Default.aspx> (accessed: 22 November 2009).
2. This was a group consisting of eighteen politicians of international repute, chaired by the former German Chancellor Willy Brandt.
3. ‘Sustaining an Argument’, www.economist.com/debate (accessed: 30 July 2009).
4. Ibid.
5. For an overview of the criticisms, see a January 2002 special issue of the *Scientific American* (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=the-skeptical-environment>). Also see David Pimentel (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_kmske/is_2_9/ai_n28903009/), Stuart Pimm and Jeff Harvey’s article in *Nature* (<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v414/n6860/full/414149a0.html>) and Richard M. Fisher (<http://www.csi.cop.org/si/2002-11/environment.html>) (accessed: 26 July 2009).
6. For further details, see http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/global_warming_contrarians/ucs-examines-the-skeptical.html.
7. For more on Lovelock’s work, see <http://www.jameslovelock.org/>.
8. For more on this, see ‘Poorer Nations Reject a Target on Emission Cut’, *The New York Times*, 08 July 2009.
9. Mr. Singh as quoted in ‘Hu flies home, Singh steps in: India voices climate dissent’, *The Telegraph* (India), 09 July 2009.
10. Ibid.
11. ‘Africa Seeks Climate Change Cash’, BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8217449.stm> (accessed: 15 November 2009).
12. Yvo de Boer, Executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), cited in ‘The Essentials in Copenhagen’, <http://en.cop15.dk/news/view+news?newsid=876> (accessed: 8 November 2009).
13. Para 8, Copenhagen Accord, http://www.denmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/C41B62AB-4688-4ACE-BB7B-F6D2C8AAEC20/0/copenhagen_accord.pdf (accessed: 31 January 2010).
14. This part of the essay is an abridged version of a monograph: Kjellberg and Banik (2000).
15. For a critical stance couched in a comparative perspective, see Khator (1991).
16. The district is the intermediate level in Indian public administration, corresponding largely to the county/province in a European context. Tamil Nadu has 30 administrative districts; each administered by a district Collector, an officer of the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS). North Arcot Ambedkar district was subsequently divided into two districts: Vellore and Tiruvannamalai.
17. PIL refers not to specific individual grievance, but to a damage or threat of damage to the public interest. For more, see Singh (1996) and Mitra and Chakravarty (1997).
18. Judgement of Aug. 28, 1996, Writ Petition (civil) No. 914/1991.
19. In other parts of the country, other minority groups have typically controlled the profession, for example, the Chinese who largely control the Tangra area, where most tanneries are located in Calcutta.
20. The term ‘Scheduled Castes’ (SC) is an administrative term introduced by the British to denote the communities (castes) outside the *Varna* system. Historically ‘outcast’ or ‘pariah’.

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- they have been the object of blatant discrimination throughout India.
21. For an elaboration and critique of the methodological and normative aspects of this perspective, see Kjellberg (1995a; 1995b).
 22. Hindutva means 'Hinduness', and aims at the creation of a Hindu nation.
 23. Gore (2006, back cover text).
 24. http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/docs/weo2009/climate_change_excerpt.pdf (accessed: 24 October 2009).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. By 'hunger', I mean undernutrition (lack of adequate quantity and quality of food) and starvation (lack of food intake).
2. As a starting point, I shall use Aiken's (1996) excellent framework to analyse Hardin's formulation – an approach Aiken terms 'Argument T', since this is often associated with 'triage' policy (a system of assigning priority of food aid to certain sections/ groups of the population during a food crisis). For a summary of Hardin's approach, see Sellers (1976).
3. Hardin attacks the United Nations for promoting precisely this course of action in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which describes the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. The UDHR also advocates that any choice and decision with regard to the size of the family must irrevocably rest with the family itself, and cannot be made by anyone else.
4. Fletcher's emphasis in italics.
5. Nozick's emphasis in italics.
6. Damage to the environment is often cited as an example of this sort.
7. Singer's 'Famine, Affluence and Morality' (1972) encouraged the production, in the 1970s and early 1980s, of a substantial volume of literature on the subject. This was followed by his 1974 article, 'Philosophers are Back on the Job', where he forcefully argued for the philosophical turn to applied ethics by using the example of the ethics of famine relief.
8. Originally published in 1972.
9. For a detailed overview, see Morrissey (2006). Also see Lensink and Morrissey (2000), Hansen and Tarp (2001), Dalgaard, Hansen and Tarp (2004), Clemens, Radelet and Bhavani (2004) and Sachs (2005).
10. Parts of this section are inspired by, and based on, Lawrence Hinman's (University of San Diego) overview available on <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/Applied/WorldHunger/index.asp>.
11. Shue (1980) classifies three basic rights: the right to subsistence, the right to security and the right to liberty. These are basic because they provide essential preconditions for the exercise of other and more complex rights. Then he identifies three corresponding duties: the duty not to deprive, the duty to protect from standard threats of deprivation and the duty to aid the deprived. Thus an individual having the right to subsistence (food, water, shelter and clothing) means that others have a duty not to take these away from him (by, for instance, robbery), and the individual also has the right to be protected from any form of standard threats to his subsistence. Moreover, these correlative duties primarily fall on government agencies, with the active support of citizens.
12. For a very good overview of Kant's moral philosophy, see the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/> (accessed: 29 November 2009).
13. This is a general right based on human need: 'A person involuntarily undergoing extreme deprivation which would lead to his or her death has a moral right to the goods and services required to prevent that death. The sufferer has this right against any and all who are in a position to provide the necessary goods and services, since the sufferer's need puts them under an obligation to prevent his death' (Aiken 1977, 86).

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14. Aiken rejects a fourth possible minimal condition as suggested by Richard Brandt (1959, 439), namely that of being the 'last resort'. Brandt suggests that if one is the only one capable of helping someone in extreme need, then there exists a moral obligation to assist. Aiken (1977, 93) rightly points out that inherent in this condition lies the danger and difficulty in determining and identifying what consists of being the 'last resort'.
15. See Blix *et al.* (1971), Aykroyd (1974), Currey (1978), Cox (1981) and Devereux (1993).
16. Interview with José Ramón Cossío Díaz, June 2008. Mexico City.

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