



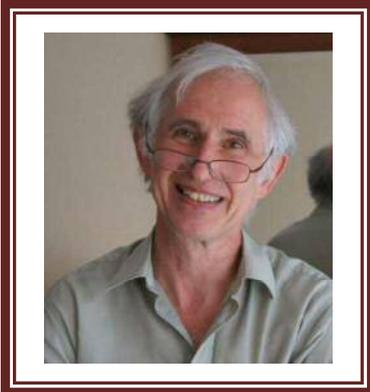
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- Featured article: **The Importance of Shame-proofing Social Protection**
by Robert Walker

Robert Walker is Professor of Social Policy at University of Oxford and Fellow of Green Templeton College, UK. He has published twenty books, over fifty research reports and more than 150 academic articles and chapters on poverty, social security, and research methodology. Recently he led an international research project focusing on the individual and societal consequences of the shame experienced by people as a result of experiencing poverty. This research draws heavily on the work of a research team comprising Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, Elaine Chase, SohailChoudhry, Erika Gubrium, IvarLødemel, JO Yongmie (Nicola), Leemamol Mathew, AmonMwiine, Sony Pellissery and YAN Ming and was jointly funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and Department for International Development



Poverty is not simply the lack of income but rather the multifarious consequences of such a lack that are experienced simultaneously by people in poverty. Some consequences in later years serve to prolong poverty and thus become the causes, if not of poverty per se, then of its persistence. It is argued that the shame associated with poverty is one such consequence and that it is essential to take this into account in the design and implementation of social protection systems.

The shame of poverty

The Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, has argued that shame lies at the "absolutist core" of poverty; by implication it is an attribute of poverty that is experienced by individuals, families and communities everywhere. While research can never provide definitive proof of Sen's universalistic assertion, new and about to be published studies^{3,4,8} offer strong supportive evidence that shame is an integral component of the lived experience of poverty in settings as different, in terms of economic development and cultural legacy, as rural Uganda and India; urban China, Pakistan, South Korea and United Kingdom; and small town and urban Norway. Poverty was defined in the research with reference to local norms and definitions, which meant that the degree of material deprivation experienced varied markedly. It ranged, for example, from not owning a car in Norway to not being able to afford salt with which

to season and preserve food in Uganda, from living in a brick-built house sometimes prone to dampness in Britain to a 'katcha' (shack) in Pakistan built from mud and plastic sheeting without water or sanitation.

The research shows that, despite marked differences in material hardship, people's aspirations when living in poverty are very similar. They include: being a good parent, partner, kin-member and citizen; making ends meet; having a good life; and shaping a better future for their children. The reality in their lives, however, is that they are often unable ever to attain these aspirations owing to a lack of income. Shame emerges as a ubiquitous constituent in the experience of poverty arising from the failure of people to achieve even the most basic of their own aspirations, from their inability to fulfil social expectations placed upon them by others, and from the sense of being judged failures by others on account of their lack of resources.

The similarity of the experience of shame associated with poverty, despite different levels of material hardship, points to the validity of treating poverty as relative, with poverty thresholds set in relation to local living standards. Poverty feels the same to people experiencing it irrespective of its material manifestations. This similarity also offers the prospect of engaging in a meaningful global debate about poverty that simultaneously embraces people affected by poverty in the rich global North and in much less prosperous countries clustered in the global South.

The costs of shame

But why is shame important? Everybody has felt ashamed on occasion and knows how hurtful it can be. Psychologists have talked of a psychic scar that refuses to heal. Imagine what shame must be like if it is experienced every day and is caused by something over which one has little or no control. In this, shame differs profoundly from guilt. Guilt arises from things one has done and can be assuaged by a change of behaviour. Shame, on the other hand, appertains to who one is and to what one has become. Moreover, shame, while internally felt, is externally imposed by others: by the people one knows; the officials that one encounters; and by the politicians one hears, who help to shape public opinion.

But, probably even more important, shame has social and personal consequences that are almost invariably negative. Individuals respond to the shame associated with poverty in various ways. They keep up appearances and pretend that everything is normal, which means living with the fear of being found out or shown up; shame increases the risk, too, of over-extending on finances and incurring bad debts. People in poverty typically reduce social contact so as to avoid experiencing situations in which they are exposed to shame but they thereby denude their networks of support. Sometimes, shame drives people into clinical depression, to substance abuse and even to suicide. Shame divides society: the public rhetoric of deserving and undeserving reinforces the gap between rich and poor and causes people in poverty to suspect their equals of dishonesty and depravity. Shame saps self-esteem, erodes social capital and diminishes personal efficacy, raising the possibility that it serves also to perpetuate poverty by reducing individuals' ability to help themselves.

The shame experienced as a result of being in poverty is not solely an individual problem. It is imposed by society. People living in poverty are dismissed as being worthless and lazy. They are casually exploited as cheap labour and consistently blamed for the failures of the state and the weakness of the economy. Shame is often reinforced in the framing, structure and delivery of social protection, as evidenced by policy analyses in each of the seven countries studied⁴. Labels and concepts such as dependency, scrounger, work-shy, loser, sufferer and even being 'poor' are effectively terms of abuse. Schemes, however well intentioned, that deny social protection recipients voice and control are likely to be counterproductive, disempowering and demoralising; they can do this, for example, through the application of overly complex rules and unaccountable discretionary decisions, or by presuming incompetence, as conditional cash transfer schemes often do. Under-resourced schemes, staffed by under-trained staff with poor administrative systems that

inadvertently or deliberately impose high compliance costs on recipients, are commonplace and reinforce the negative image of welfare provision and the people that use it.

Sometimes the imposition of shame in the form of stigma is justified by policy makers and supported by popular opinion. Both naming and shaming, and blaming and shaming are commonly thought to be effective ways of policing access to welfare benefits and of changing and regulating anti-social and self-destructive behaviour. However, such beliefs are based on two false assumptions, namely, that poverty is the result of personal failings and behavioural deficiencies and that shaming leads to positive changes in behaviour. In fact, global poverty is largely a structural phenomenon caused by factors beyond individual control relating to the workings of the economy, the mix of factors of production and the outcome of primary and secondary resource allocation. Moreover, the scientific evidence is clear that shaming generally does not lead to constructive behavioural change, even in situations where change would be possible.

Justice that is effective and inexpensive

Poverty-related shame has been neglected with global scientific and policy attention being focussed elsewhere. The Millennium Development Goals drew attention to the importance of tackling poverty globally and to the importance of being able to measure progress. Measures based on income and expenditure were comparatively simple to implement, while the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and the importance of the so-called 'subjective' dimensions have only recently been recognised. It is highly probable that, by neglecting shame, global success in reducing the pain and social costs of poverty has been significantly overstated.

If policy makers and researchers have underplayed the salience of shame, people with the direct experience of poverty have repeatedly underlined its importance when given the opportunity to do so. ATD Fourth World is an international, non-governmental organisation committed to facilitating that the voices of people in poverty are heard. Global participation by people with direct experience of poverty caused the organisation to recognise poverty as violence¹. One participant, a mother from Peru, spoke for many when she said that 'the worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt...experienced...every day; it hurts us, humiliates us and makes us live in fear and shame'².

It is not difficult to shame-proof social protection policies. Policymakers need only to ask themselves how they would want to be treated. Even more effectively, they should be engaging the people that they are striving to assist directly in the design of policy and its implementation, asking them what they would welcome and what should be avoided. Indeed, the International Labour Organisation Recommendation 202 on social protection floors means that the 185 member governments are expected, as a product of lobbying by the ICSW among others, to have 'respect for the rights and dignity of people covered by the social security guarantees'⁵. Furthermore, the growing body of international human-rights legislation appertaining to extreme poverty is even more insistent that governments, and society generally should accord respect to persons in poverty. The 2013 resolution of the UN General Assembly on extreme poverty⁷ affirms the guiding principles adopted by the UN Human Rights Council, which assert that:

'Respect for the inherent dignity of those living in poverty must inform all public policies. State agents and private individuals must respect the dignity of all, avoid stigmatization and prejudices, and recognize and support the efforts that those living in poverty are making to improve their lives...'⁶

The usual conundrum in policymaking that doing the right thing is more expensive for once does not apply. Indeed if, as the research suggests, policies that promote dignity are more effective than those that do not, then shame-proofing is cheaper, better and just. This becomes self-evident only when the negative personal and social consequences of the shame inherent in poverty are recognised alongside the role of poorly designed, stigmatising policies in exacerbating such shame.

Social protection is essential in the fight against poverty as an integral part of sustainable development. But, it must be protection that is effective and cost-effective; therefore it must be designed to promote human dignity.

- 1) ATD Fourth World (2013a) *Ending the violence of extreme poverty - a must for sustainable societies*; Pierrelaye: International Movement ATD Fourth World; http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/IMG/pdf/rio_updated_proposals.pdf.
- 2) ATD Fourth World (2013b) *Towards Sustainable Development that Leaves No One Behind: The challenge of the post-2015 agenda*, New York: International ATD Fourth World Movement. (p.6)
- 3) Chase, E. and Bantebya, G. (2014) *The Shame of Poverty: Global experiences*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 4) Gubrium, E., Pellissery, S. and Lødemel, I. (2013) *The Shame of It: Global perspectives on anti-poverty policies*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- 5) ILO (2012) *Recommendation Concerning National Floors of Social Protection*, adopted by the Conference at its one hundred and first session, 14th June 2012. Geneva: ILO, Recommendation 202.
- 6) UN (2012) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights*, New York: United Nations General Assembly Sixty-seventh session, Item 70 (b) of the provisional agenda; A/67/278; <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/467728.637158871.html>. p. 6
- 7) UN (2013) *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 67/164. Human rights and extreme poverty* New York, United Nations General Assembly [on the report of the Third Committee (A/67/457/Add.2 and Corr.1)], General distribution: 13th March.(p. 3)
- 8) Walker, R. (2014) *The Shame of Poverty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Publication date: 25th June 2014.)

The opinions expressed in the article are those of the author and may not necessarily coincide with the opinions of the ICSW Management Committee.

➤ **ICSW speaks up on the issue of older women and the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

ICSW statement at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, March 2014

The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) promotes gender equality for girls and women of all ages. Older women are particularly disadvantaged in relation to poverty and development strategies worldwide. With the continued ageing of the world's population, this must change.

The effect of rapid population ageing across the world is that we are entering into the era of the 'age bulge', where by 2030 there will be more people over 60 than children under 10. By 2050, there will be 2 billion older people in the planet, the majority of whom will be women - current figures show that there are 100 women for every 84 men over the age of 60¹. For those over 80 years of age, there are 100 women for every 61 older men - and most of the older women will be

1

Ageing in the 21st century: a celebration and challenge, chapter 1 page 27: UNFPA and HelpAge International: London 2013

living in developing countries². This is why we must ensure that the voices of older women are heard and that their participation is facilitated in the development of the post 2015 framework.

We support Beyond 2015's call for a single universal development framework that takes into account poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, inequality, human rights and global responsibility. Older women are contributors to sustainable development and poverty eradication. Lifetime inequalities of income, education, employment, health, disability and gender are likely to increase with age and must be recognised. Discrimination on the basis of gender and age is still widespread in all regions of the world.

Therefore to ensure that the post-2015 development framework truly 'leaves no one behind', is inclusive of older women along with others and addresses the rights and needs of girls and women of all ages, we insist that **population dynamics, including the global population ageing of women, must be taken into account across all goals, targets and indicators for the post-2015 sustainable development framework to be effective and legitimate.**

The ICSW supports universal social protection, considering it a crucial element of people-centred development and an important enabling factor conducive to protecting human rights, developing human potential and reducing income inequalities. In that light we consider Recommendation No. 202 of the International Labour Conference concerning national floors of social protection, adopted unanimously in mid-June 2012 by the ILO member States and social partner organizations, to be an important step forward toward universalism in the provision of social protection.

ILO document GB.316/INS/5/1 summarizes that path-breaking recommendation as follows: Recommendation No. 202 provides guidance to Members to establish - in accordance with national circumstances - as quickly as possible and maintain their social protection floors comprising basic social security guarantees which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary at the national level. National social protection floors should comprise at least the following social security guarantees:

- *access to essential health care for all, including maternity care;*
- *basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;*
- *basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and*
- *basic income security for older persons.*

According to the Recommendation, countries should monitor progress in implementing social protection floors and achieving other objectives of national social security extension strategies. This should include regularly convening national consultations to assess progress and discuss policies for the further horizontal and vertical extension of social security.

We make the following recommendations to UN Member States:

- The post-2015 sustainable development framework must be **human-rights-based** for all girls and women of all ages. All goals and their targets must take account of the rights of girls and women of all ages at all stages of their lives. The specific abuse and discrimination faced by older women must be recognised and stopped.

2

World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision, UNFPA.
<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

- The 'data revolution' called for by the High-level Panel and the Secretary-General must give priority to improved **data collection and reporting** which ensures that **all data be collected, disaggregated, analysed and disseminated for all ages up to and over 100**, as well as by gender and disability. Goals and targets adopted by Member States must be measurable and accountable to all their citizens, and have specific data on older age groups, including specifically older women. Data must be age-disaggregated to show how policies and budgets - including those to ensure regular income, education, decent work, protection in conflict and humanitarian crises and a supportive and safe environment - are being delivered to girls and women of all ages across the life-course.
- The framework should have the goal of universal **social protection and decent work for girls and women of all ages**. Social protection and decent work are at the heart of the social contract between the State and its subjects. Social protection floors are rights-based, nationally owned and have clear measurable objectives. They play a distinctive role in poverty eradication and good governance and underpin the realisation of multiple goals beyond poverty and inequality.
- Any health goals within the framework should be framed to ensure and **maximize a healthy life expectancy at all stages of life**, including universal health coverage to ensure the health of girls and women across the life-course.³ With three quarters of the global burden of chronic and non-communicable disease affecting women and men over the age of 60, special emphasis must be given to diagnosis, care and effective treatment of older people. Older women, who live longer than men with chronic and non-communicable diseases, should be especially targeted.
- The framework should have **a gender equality goal with indicators and targets that are inclusive of all people of all ages**. Lifetime gender-based inequalities often result in older women experiencing financial and physical abuse and discrimination, along with poor health and increasing disability.

The International Council on Social Welfare recommends the following:

- Recognise age as one of the cross-cutting issues that must be taken into account across all goals and targets for girls and women of all ages;
- Create a universal rights-based framework that includes older women;
- Eradicate poverty in all its forms for all older women;
- Leave no older woman behind by tackling inequality and exclusion, including removing barriers to the full participation of all girls and women of all ages in society regardless of age, disability and gender;
- Promote inclusive growth, decent employment, social protection and ensuring access to all for essential services for girls and women of all ages;
- Improve health by addressing universal healthcare coverage, access and affordability, and address the burden of non-communicable diseases for girls and women of all ages;

3

Advanced unedited copy: Progress report on the work of the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals at its first four sessions, paragraphs 87-89

<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1927interimreport.pdf>

- Promote better accountability through a 'data revolution' with age-disaggregated data – to measure and monitor progress by age, gender and disability so as to capture gaps within and between population groups, specifically including older women.

A post-2015 development agenda should account for a progressively and rapidly ageing world by promoting healthy ageing and economic well-being for women in old age, and by providing enabling and supportive environments where older women are integrated into the development process as an asset rather than a burden.

We look forward to a dynamic and universal response to ageing in this framework. As population structures change, laws, policies, social attitudes and institutional practices must do the same. UN Member States have an historic opportunity to ensure that the next global development framework takes a life-course approach that will help ensure sustainable and equitable development for girls and women of all ages.

➤ **ICSW regional elections**

The spring of 2014 is election season for the ICSW—several key positions in the regions become vacant this July and must be filled through elections. The candidates who have been nominated (nominations closed on 3rd May) include prominent scholars and practitioners working in the field of social policy, whose activities are well known in the regions. Each candidate submits a written statement outlining what he or she is seeking to achieve and what his or her contribution to ICSW has been. It is well known that every position—whether it is a Regional President, Vice-President, Treasurer or a Member of the Board-- requires substantial time and dedication. There are nine ICSW regions: Central and West Africa; East and Southern Africa; Middle East and North Africa; South Asia; South-East Asia and the Pacific; North-East Asia; Europe; North America and the Caribbean; Latin America. Under the global By-laws, each region must have at least a Regional President, a Regional Vice-President and a Regional Treasurer.

Elections will be conducted electronically, with the whole process concluding on 12 June 2014 – 30 days before the meeting of the General Assembly on 12 July 2014.

➤ **Useful resources and links.**

Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries, UNDP, 2013

Revisiting the theoretical concepts of inequalities, including their measurements, and an analysis of their global trends, this report presents policy-makers' perception of inequalities in 15 countries and identifies various policy options in combating this major developmental challenge of our time. The report makes the basic point that, in spite of the impressive progress humanity has made on many fronts over the decades, it still remains deeply divided. In that context, it is intended to help development actors, citizens, and policy-makers contribute to global dialogues and initiate conversations in their own countries about the drivers and the extent of inequalities, their impact, and the ways in which they can be curbed.

For a full report please go to:

http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Humanity%20Divided/HumanityDivided_Full-Report.pdf

➤ **The Political Economy of Pension Re-Reform in Chile and Argentina: Toward More Inclusive Protection, UNRISD, 2014**

This research paper written by KatjaHujo and Mariana Rulli argues that reforms implemented in 2008, the re-nationalization of the private pension funds in Argentina and the introduction of a

social pension in Chile, have moved both countries toward greater social inclusion in old-age protection. For more details please see:

[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpPublications\)/13C947C84CC4FAFFC1257CAF004697A0?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpPublications)/13C947C84CC4FAFFC1257CAF004697A0?OpenDocument)

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