

Chapter 4

Operationalizing the Right to Development for Realizing Sustainable Development: Eliminating Poverty, Hunger, and Inequality

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Learning Objectives:

- To understand the linkages between poverty, hunger, inequality, and sustainable development.
- To analyze the Sustainable Development Goals related to poverty, hunger, and inequality incorporated in the 2030 Agenda.
- To understand how operationalizing the Right to Development can help in more effective realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets related to poverty, hunger, and inequality.

Introduction

A life subjected to poverty, hunger, and inequality is both the root cause of, and the extreme side effect from, underdevelopment. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals address each one of these calamities as separate but inter-related challenges.¹ All three conditions are considered to be tragic, unnecessary, and, most importantly, avoidable. Yet, they have been, and continue to be, part of each and every society dating back to antiquity. For international development scholars, it is important to focus on how poverty, hunger, and inequality are avoidable rather than the fact that they have been constant states in human history. What’s more, the solutions to these challenges are often best found in improving “upstream determinants” to prevent calamities from occurring in the first place. The existence of poverty, hunger, and inequality violate the right to development (RtD) as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, 1986 (DRTD)², and as such require additional attention by scholars and policy makers to ensure the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.³

The challenge at hand is to understand what factors lead to severe inequality, hunger, and poverty, take the steps to prevent it, and still have the capacity to respond in emergency situations. This Chapter looks at poverty, hunger, and inequality as three separate experiences, while recognizing

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¹ For the list of Sustainable Development Goals, see: A/RES/70/1. For further information, see also: United Nations, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*, available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300> (accessed on 28 August 2017).

² A/RES/41/128

³ A/RES/70/1

that all three are also inherently interlinked. The Chapter argues that poverty, hunger, and inequality persist because global society does not find them morally troubling enough to ensure their complete eradication.⁴ As a result, many nations do not directly implement policies specifically targeting the upstream factors of these issues, and instead policy makers tend to address them through attention to secondary determinants, notably by increasing economic growth and democratic transparency. Yet, the DRTD calls, directly, for the elimination of severe inequalities. This Chapter demonstrates that attention to these two determinants alone is insufficient to eradicate the conditions of deep poverty, and that greater attention to the social determinants of poverty, hunger, and inequality warrant direct attention and policy action. The Chapter concludes with a discussion as to how poverty, hunger, and inequality undermine the RtD, and how the 2030 Agenda can better approach these three pressing development factors by adopting a framework that promotes the RtD.

Poverty

In some respects, the world is healthier and wealthier than ever before in human history. In 1916, Australia and Sweden enjoyed the highest life expectancy in the world at 58 years.⁵ That same year, Switzerland was the wealthiest nation on the planet with a GDP per person of \$10,600 (adjusted for inflation). Meanwhile, the poorest area of earth was what is now Malawi with only \$356 per person (adjusted for inflation). Turkey had the lowest life expectancy of only 19 years, from a combination of wretched poverty in rural areas and the slaughter of the First World War. Today, the Central African Republic, the world’s poorest nation, has a Gross Domestic Product of \$599. Lesotho has the world’s worst life expectancy rate of only 49 years. Meanwhile, Japan’s life expectancy is 84 years, and Luxembourg is the world’s wealthiest nation with a Gross Domestic Product per person of \$88,300.⁶ The world has generally made gains in both health and wealth in the last 100 years – an unprecedented achievement never seen before in human history. However, the inequalities of the human condition have also never been greater.

The staggering inequality between the healthiest and the sickest, and the wealthiest and poorest peoples is a remarkably new phenomenon. Comparing nations is one matter, but even to compare individual wealth, the inequalities are even more pronounced. In 2007, there were 415 USD Billionaires in the United States, 34 in India, and only 3 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, the percentage of people living under \$1.25 a day in Sub-Saharan Africa ranged between 16% (South Africa) up to 85% (Madagascar) of the population depending on the country.⁷ This extreme level of inequality is a relatively new phenomenon in human history in terms of the actual dollar amounts and actual life years. The world may be healthier and wealthier on the whole compared to times past, but the extremities experienced today are crushing. What’s more, in this ascent in life years and wealth, the benefits of affluence simply do not get afforded to marginalized and vulnerable peoples.

⁴ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human rights* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008).

⁵ Gapminder.org, *Gapminder World* (The Gapminder Foundation, 2016), available at www.gapminder.org (accessed on 28 August 2017).

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

A naïve argument would say that this happened by accident in the process of modernization and globalization.⁸ A more cunning argument may suggest that there was intention in this inequality, as the world needs some level of poverty in order to maintain the broader benefits of a generally wealthy society. However, neither argument is correct, or well thought out. To understand not just why poverty persists, but also why staggering inequalities exist, it is important to ask the question of what actually maintains deep poverty? Thomas Pogge suggests that both simple and sophisticated defences exist as to why the world maintains deep poverty.⁹ These are worth discussing.

A simple explanation is that the affluent believe that “the persistence of severe poverty does not require moral attention”.¹⁰ For affluent societies, there is a tendency to view the plight of foreigners as detached from their own national interests, which means that conditions of deep poverty in a resource-poor setting is viewed as having little association on the behaviour of the affluent nation. Recently, such lofty nationalism has been on the rise in many affluent democracies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Hungary, and increasingly so in France and Germany.¹¹ The integrity of this argument, as Pogge suggests, is quite feeble, but it still tends to attract political enthusiasm. This simple explanation ignores deep economic connections between nations, and overlooks how globalization has pronounced impacts on conditions of poverty or productivity between affluent and resource-poor nations. Another simple defence embraces the complexity of globalization to suggest that small actions in one nation, say with regard to climate change policy, will have little to no impact on a greater scale if other nations do not participate in the process. It suggests that globalization is, in fact, so complex that small acts to relieve poverty in one part of the world will have little impact in another part of the world. For both the nationalist and the globalist perspective, simple defences arise to say, “severe poverty abroad does not require moral attention”.¹²

As Pogge suggests, those who judge an issue not worthy of moral attention cannot sophisticatedly defend their claim, because they do not necessarily care about that issue.¹³ It then becomes a question as to why some individuals are not concerned with issues of deep poverty, and why others are compelled to action. It is entirely possible to present clear and effective data on the upstream causes of deep poverty in a compelling way. It may galvanize some people for action, and for others only to accept this condition as inevitable. Why?

Explaining this requires understanding the moral reasons that people find in order to come to this conclusion. Broadly speaking, there are four moral reasons that both governments and individuals

⁸ Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky (eds.), *New poverty studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics, and Impoverished People in the United States*, (New York, NYU Press, 2001).

⁹ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ See: Andrea Bohman and Mikael Hjerm, “In the Wake of Radical Right Electoral Success: a cross-country comparative study of anti-immigration attitudes over time”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.42, no.11 (2016), pp.1729–47; Bart Bonikowski and Paul DiMaggio, “Varieties of American Popular Nationalism”, *American Sociological Review*, vol.81, no.5 (2016), pp. 949-80.

¹² Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*.

¹³ Ibidem.

employ to justify the existence of deep poverty. The first is “futility” in saying that there is no point or any good in simply throwing money at issues of deep poverty, hunger, or inequality.¹⁴ This assumption views world poverty as one over-arching issue, rather than as many different and compounding factors that can be compartmentalized and addressed at the local level.

The second, as Pogge suggests, is “jeopardy” meaning that deep poverty is too big of a problem to address and still maintain social orders.¹⁵ Specifically, this justification assumes that the current orders of society in terms of governance and flows of capital are justified, and if deep poverty was properly addressed, it would change these orders dramatically, possibly beyond the capabilities and control of current governments. This is a lofty assumption from positions of privilege to suggest that it is better for humanity to sacrifice the liberties of the marginalized in order to maintain the affluence and power of a designated elite. It is an argument that is difficult to defend in any rational conversation, but it is a moral, albeit emotional, response to justify not dealing with deep poverty.

The defence of “perversity”, meaning to continue behaving in a way that knowingly maintains poverty, is grounded in the assumption that addressing deep poverty would lead to overpopulation.¹⁶ This is a tragic way of thinking in that it morally accepts poverty, and it falsely assumes that supposed Malthusian overpopulation would be a worse outcome for humanity than current conditions of poverty. The overpopulation thesis is a misguided argument, yet it does come up in some scholarly literatures. Issues of overpopulation and resource strain are often reserved to places with deep poverty, rather than to more affluent society. Singapore, Malta, and The Netherlands are all densely populated countries, and yet none of them experience conditions of deep poverty. Of the top ten most densely populated nations, it is only Bangladesh (in tenth place) that struggles with serious resource and population challenges.¹⁷ According to the International Monetary Fund, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Burundi are the world’s poorest nations when measured by GDP per capita.¹⁸ The DRC and CAR are two of the least densely populated countries in the world (178th and 224th, respectively). Burundi is the 30th, meaning that 29 other countries are significantly more crowded, but do not experience the same level of poverty. In sum, developed nations are often healthier; more sustainable, and can be more sustainable with the use of natural resources than those in a condition of underdevelopment. Pogge suggests that because the Malthusian argument holds little credit it can be considered a false pretense in order to maintain perversity to deep poverty.¹⁹

Fourth, as Pogge suggests, there is a sense of “optimism” that the global system is effectively eradicating poverty and that mechanisms of foreign aid assistance are making the situation better,

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Gapminder.org, *Gapminder World*

¹⁸ Jonathan Gregson, *The Poorest Countries in the World* (Global Finance, 2017), available at <https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/the-poorest-countries-in-the-world> (accessed on 28 August 2017).

¹⁹ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*.

and hence it does not require any additional moral attention.²⁰ It is a claim that thanks to the billions of dollars spent annually, world poverty is on the decline and that most people are becoming healthier and wealthier. This belief is created and sustained through several narratives that emerge from the development industry itself. Almost always, when a development project is announced to the public, the real dollar value will be in the headlines. The more money given to a particular cause suggests that the specific development issue is being successfully addressed. The other narrative that encourages optimism comes from measuring poverty reduction in instalments. Targets to eliminate poverty are often framed in 10 to 30 year windows, rather than addressing it as an immediate crisis. If 50,000 people die each day on a global scale to poverty-related concerns, then even over a 10-year window, it becomes a staggering loss of life of some 180 million people. As Pogge suggests, such a staggering loss of life done at the hands of any government would be deemed genocide of the poor.²¹ Yet, the moral enthusiasm to view deep poverty is not universally shared.

All four simple defences can be easily challenged and dismissed, and they even contradict themselves. It suggests that anyone who employs one of the simple defences to justify not dealing with world poverty must hold on to a deeper conviction as to why it is not so troubling to warrant its entire eradication. Herein lies the sophisticated defence, according to Pogge. “The behaviour of our nations and global institutions are doing nothing seriously wrong so as to warrant drastic or immediate attention”.²² It is a defence employed by those who recognize the shortcomings of the simple defences, but also of those who realize that affluent governments could do more to address poverty with little consequence to them, yet they choose not to. Here, the sophisticated defence is rooted in strong convictions of nationalism and patriotism to suggest that the well-being of compatriots must come before the needs of foreigners. If the world is divided into separate nations who compete with each other for resources, power, and recognition, there is no actual, or desired, binding agreement to ensure that each nation contributes their share to the abolition of poverty. International meetings and forums on climate change, foreign aid, poverty reduction, and so forth, all aim to bind independent Nation-States to a form of obligation to improve the quality of life. Pogge warns that addressing poverty through obligation, rather than conviction, is doomed to fail.²³ When individuals or Nation- States are formally obliged to meet contributions, goals, or targets, there will be moral loopholes to allow the participant to do less, or to withdraw from the commitment. Moral conviction, however, suggests that the purpose for participation comes from within the participant and to ensure that an objective is met. If governments and individuals are obliged to go above and beyond their own normative behaviour to address an issue, it implies that only through exceptional behaviour can world poverty be addressed. It says nothing of how poverty can be overcome through normative (day-to-day) behaviour backed by national and international institutions based on the conviction that it is in our best interests to do so. Obligations that pivot normative behaviour against moral values create room for dichotomies and resistance to the obligation. Actions based on moral convictions are done with greater enthusiasm and participation; however, they must demonstrate that it is in the participants’ best interest to do so. This becomes a serious challenge when dealing with Nation-States, as nations tend to employ

²⁰ Ibidem

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem.

narratives of community and cohesion amongst compatriots that supersedes the needs of others.²⁴

If international cooperation is handled mostly through obligations to participate, a need exists for a system of incentives and punishments for those who actively contribute and for those who deviate from their commitments. In either case, if the incentives or deterrents are too feeble, then the participant nation may lack enthusiasm to maintain their commitments. To withdraw from international obligations to reduce poverty, a nation must seek a moral loophole to do so. Moral loopholes, according to Pogge, arise when participation in an obligation leads to a “regret of conduct”. With nationalism, any form of altruism, or exceptional efforts for foreigners rather than compatriots, can lead to such regrettable conduct. So, in this case the idea is that taking action for the benefit of foreigners rather than compatriots can lead to regrettable conduct through expressions of lofty nationalism or populist xenophobia. For example, an affluent nation is unlikely to impose small consumption taxes on its own compatriots in order to help alleviate poverty in a foreign country. It is likely that imposing taxation on compatriots in order to boost foreign aid commitments would be seen as unfavourable unless there is some obvious and visible benefit to those compatriots. Even though raising funds through taxation of fuel in North America to raise funds for assisting those directly impacted by climate change could be taken as equitable, the political backlash from voters will lead to a regret of conduct amongst politicians. This may lead to a withdrawal of support from their international poverty assistance commitments, as long as the punishment for doing so does not supersede the regret of domestic backlash, or that imposing small consumption taxes on compatriots to help offset poverty abroad could be viewed unfavourably. The Nation-State will then behave in a way to test their obligations, as their behaviour is not guided by conviction, but by a balancing of responsibilities.

In sum, the persistence of deep poverty continues because affluent Nation-States do not see that their own behaviour, which principally means meeting the needs of their compatriots, is directly causing deep poverty. Simple defences for not addressing poverty exist, but they are quickly dismissed without any informed debate. The real issue with the persistence of poverty, from a cosmopolitan framework at least, is that the affluent do not care enough about poverty in order to make it vanish. Affluent nations tend to respond to poverty through reactionary foreign aid and through the work of volunteers. Cosmopolitans, like Pogge, suggest that deeper inroads on poverty can be made if affluent nations moved from a sense of obligation to react to a sense of moral conviction to eradicate it. The question remains as to whether the tools and capabilities exist to eliminate poverty, which can be debated at length. The more pressing issue at hand is why the affluent do not feel moral conviction to eradicate poverty in the first place?

Hunger

Many people are often shocked to learn that the poorest places in the world are not the most overcrowded.²⁵ So too are many people surprised to learn that the hungriest countries in the world,

²⁴ Ibidem. See also: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London and New York, Verso, 2006); Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Society* (New York, Courier Corporation, 1957).

²⁵ Frances Lappé, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset, *World Hunger: 12 Myths* (New York, Grove Press, 1998).

measured by the global hunger index, are Central African Republic, Chad, and Zambia.²⁶ These are all countries with tremendous parcels of land, and in the case of Zambia, a nation that sells its land to produce foodstuffs for smaller Gulf States.²⁷ The nations with almost no hunger, Singapore, Monaco, and Hong Kong, have almost no agricultural carrying capacity.²⁸ Some scholars suggest that every nation has the ability to feed its own people, but the challenge to hunger emerges in how food is grown, how it is transported and how it is sold. Deep hunger is a consequence of, and factor for, deep poverty. Like the concept of poverty itself, hunger dates back to antiquity. Much like poverty, sophisticated defences exist to maintain hunger, even though if it were truly eradicated there would be little consequence to the affluent.²⁹ The classic simple defence is that the world does not have enough carrying capacity to feed everyone. This is hardly true. The majority of lost foodstuffs occur not because of a dearth of farming capacity, but because of inefficient transportation, difficult trade routes, and price fixing of goods that exceed what individuals can afford.³⁰

What’s more, history shows that in the periods of famine and hunger, there were astonishing quantities of foodstuffs available that were not distributed because of political or economic reasons. During the Irish famine, Ireland exported generous quantities of wheat to England.³¹ In the 1870s, the great famine of India claimed 5.5 million lives, during a period when the country exported food and Lord Lytton, the Viceroy of India organized the Delhi Durbar – a gathering of 84,000 – for one of the most lavish and expensive feasts in human history, lasting seven days and nights.³² More recently, Ethiopia’s famine in the 1980s affected only parts of the country, which can also be said about Somalia’s famine in the 1990s.³³ All this to say that absolute famine is a political condition, rather than the product of failed crops.

Amartya Sen’s Nobel Prize winning work demonstrated that not only are famines the products of politics, but that hunger itself is the consequence of political structure and market mechanisms. Sen demonstrated that in the early stages of famine, and in economics crisis more broadly, those

²⁶ Klaus von Grebmer et al., *The Global Hunger Index* (Bonn, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (German AgroAction), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Concern Worldwide, 2008).

²⁷ Lorenzo Cotula, *Land Grab or Development Opportunity?: agricultural investment and international land deals in Africa* (Rome, FAO, 2009); Annelies Zoomers, “Globalization and the Foreignisation of Space: seven processes driving the current global land grab”, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol.37, no.2 (2010), pp. 429-447.

²⁸ Josef Schmidhuber and Francesco Tubiello, “Global Food Security Under Climate Change”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 104, no.50 (2007), pp. 19703-08.

²⁹ Arland Thornton, “The Developmental Paradigm, Reading History Sideways, and Family Change”, *Demography*, vol.38, no.4 (2001), pp. 449-65.

³⁰ H. Charles Godfray et al., “Food Security: the Challenge of Feeding 9 Billion People”, *Science*, vol.327, no.5967 (2010), pp. 812-18.

³¹ Cormac Gráda, *The great Irish Famine, Vol. 7* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³² D. Zook, “Famine in the Landscape: Imagining Hunger in South Asian History, 1860-1990”, in A. Agrawal and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds), *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representations, and Rule in India* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 107-31.

³³ Tanja Müller, “‘The Ethiopian Famine’ revisited: Band Aid and the antipolitics of celebrity humanitarian action”, *Disasters*, vol.37, no.1 (2013), pp. 61-79; Daniel Maxwell and Merry Fitzpatrick, “The 2011 Somalia Famine: Context, causes, and complications”, *Global Food Security*, vol.1, no.1 (2012), pp. 5-12.

who fared the worst were not the peasant farmers but those who relied on low-paying non-essential services.³⁴ Barbers and shoe shiners, for example, were deeply impacted because in times of economic hardship, people would not seek their services as frequently, which reduced their capacity to earn income.³⁵ If food prices rise, people will spend their resources on foodstuffs rather than haircuts or clean shoes. Persons with guaranteed employment, or access to steady income persevered to a greater degree.

Similarly, the World Food Program estimates that 795 million people in the world do not have access to food to lead an active and healthy life. This does not imply a complete absence of food, but instead a lack of nutrients within their foodstuffs. While complete starvation is a rare event, although entirely possible as witnessed in North Korea in the 1990s, malnutrition is the most common indicator of hunger. The malnourished suffer from a wide range of health calamities, especially children. Children that are stunted from vitamin deficiency will have a shorter life expectancy and face challenges with the development of their vital organs. This impacts close to 800 million, mostly in poor countries. A more common issue is “hidden hunger”, which the World Health Organization defines as the consequence of people consuming poor quality food that does not meet nutrient requirements. Calories may be consumed, but the food itself is deficient in micronutrients, vitamins and minerals needed for growth and development.³⁶ This impacts 2 billion people across the globe in rich and poor countries alike. Women and children are particularly vulnerable, and those with low-incomes can become deficient in vitamin A, iodine and iron, leading to anaemia and other health conditions.³⁷ Hidden hunger is a precondition for malnutrition, and it is directly linked to low income.

Hidden hunger can occur in the United States and the United Kingdom just as much as it can in Bangladesh or the Central African Republic. Since the issue is related more to low income rather than to actual food production, the question then becomes why actions are not taken to prevent it, through guaranteed income levels or guaranteed assistance programmes. A great deal of nutritious food is produced and often wasted due to a lack of consumption. The World Food Programme estimates that about one-third of all food is wasted, spoiled, or squandered. Several projects are underway to reduce food spoilage and to enhance transportation mechanisms.³⁸ But, does this directly change the upstream determinant of low income to prevent hidden hunger and malnutrition? While hunger is viewed as morally concerning enough to warrant attention, its root cause of income insecurity does not receive the same level of concern, and in some cases low wages are even celebrated, which ensures that hunger will continue to be a challenge directly related to poverty.

³⁴ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York, Anchor Books, 1999).

³⁵ Amartya Sen, “Famines”, *World Development*, vol. 8, no.9 (1980), pp. 613–21.

³⁶ Marc van Ameringen, “Hidden Hunger is a Global Killer”, *The Lancet Global Health Blog*, 9 October 2015, available at <http://globalhealth.thelancet.com/2015/10/09/hidden-hunger-global-killer> (accessed on 28 August 2017).

³⁷ Gina Kennedy, Guy Nantel, and Prakash Shetty, “The scourge of ‘hidden hunger’: global dimensions of micronutrient deficiencies”, *Food Nutrition and Agriculture*, vol.32 (2003), pp. 8-16.

³⁸ Julian Parfitt, Mark Barthel, and Sarah MacNaughton, “Food Waste Within Food Supply Chains: quantification and potential for change to 2050”, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences*, vol. 365, no.1554 (2010), pp.3065–81.

Inequality

Poverty and hunger are governed by inequality. If it is measured on a global scale, or on a local scale, inequality is a needed ingredient to allow poverty and hunger to perpetuate. Like the other two issues, inequality is connected to every society and dates back to ancient times. Inequality is usually thought of as a condition resulting from the uneven distribution of resources, income level, or wealth. The reasons for it are profound, and it is well beyond the scope of this Chapter to discuss the liberal and Marxist explanations for it. However, more recently, inequality is viewed more as a social condition than as strictly economic. Also, it is clear that societies with better equality factors tend to have better health outcomes, education opportunities, and often cause less environmental degradation.

Richard Wilkinson’s work focuses on the health outcomes produced by inequality in society.³⁹ Surveying data from a Whitehall study in the United Kingdom of civil service workers, Wilkinson was able to determine that people with higher status in the civil service, and thereby with greater income, led healthier and longer lives.⁴⁰ Those at the bottom pay grades often faced worse health outcomes. Wilkinson discovered that the equality differences did not need to be significant in order to produce differences in health outcomes. Those individuals who were considered the lowest tiers of upper management had noticeably better health outcomes than those ranked at the highest levels of middle management, and often the difference in salary between these rankings was minimal. Wilkinson’s thesis demonstrated that top people tend to do better in inequitable societies. Also, the more rigid inequalities are in society, the worse off health and well-being is for the entire society. While the original Whitehall study focused on the U.K., Wilkinson’s later research compared data between Nation-States to find that societies with better social equity fared better in almost all health outcomes. What’s more, the top people in an inequitable society fare considerably worse with health outcomes than do the top people of equitable societies.

Wilkinson’s work demonstrates that equity is a positive development outcome.⁴¹ His work focuses on income differences, which are certainly factors in determining inequity, but actual income in itself may not be a true determinant of inequity. For example, the real dollar value wealth of a lower income person in a poor neighbourhood in Baltimore, U.S., may be significantly higher than a farmer in Kerala, India.⁴² However, it is far more likely that the farmer in Kerala would be living a healthier and more secure life. In Sandtown, a poor area of Baltimore, life expectancy is 70 years, which is equal to that of North Korea.⁴³ In 2009, one in three adults were considered to have low literacy. Meanwhile in Kerala, life expectancy is 75 years and 95% of the adult

³⁹ Richard Wilkinson, *Unhealthy Societies: the afflictions of inequality* (London and New York, Routledge, 1996).

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² William Cockerham, *The Social Causes of Health and Disease* (London, Polity Press, 2013).

⁴³ Kaiser Health News, *Map in Poor Baltimore Neighborhoods, Life Expectancy Similar to Developing Countries*, 16 February 2016, available at <http://khn.org/news/map-in-poor-baltimore-neighborhoods-life-expectancy-similar-to-developing-countries/> (accessed on 28 August 2017).

population is literate.⁴⁴ The GINI coefficient, a measurement of inequality with more inequitable societies having a higher score, for Baltimore is 45, while Kerala is 30.⁴⁵ The comparison shows that while Baltimore is richer in actual dollar value, the lack of social services and drastic differences in inequality produce far more challenging health outcomes.

Cockerham suggests that the issues connecting inequality to health and development outcomes has less to do with real dollars themselves, and more to do with class and hierarchy within societies.⁴⁶ Cockerham argues that the differences in health outcomes from the Whitehall study may have less to do with individuals earning more than their colleagues, and more to do with their status and position of privilege in society.⁴⁷ Cockerham’s research suggests that in inequitable societies those at the top experience different forms of stress that have less health impacts than those at the bottom, and they often have better access to communities, support services, better food and living conditions. All of these factors lead to better health outcomes, and without appropriate social supports within society those at the bottom rung will be subjected to harder health and work challenges. Equitable societies may still experience hunger and poverty, but on the whole their health outcomes are often far better than those with rigid hierarchies. For Cockerham, the challenge at hand is less about raising minimum wages, and more about dismantling the class rigidities within societies that can lead to excessive vulnerability of the poor.

Operationalizing the RtD for Implementing the SDGs on Poverty, Hunger and Inequality

The RtD is “an inalienable human right” to ensure that “every human person” and “all peoples” can participate in economic, social, cultural and political development.⁴⁸ As mentioned, inequality governs the existence of hunger and poverty, and extreme inequality violates the RtD. Considering this, one of the most effective mechanisms to combating inequality would be for States to uphold and ensure the RtD. Article 2(3) of the DRTD proclaims that “States have the right and 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”⁴⁹. Equality of opportunity and universal coverage are implicit in this Article. The subsequent Articles of the Declaration emphasize the importance of nations designing development policies to adhere to the RtD. If then, hunger and poverty can be seen as products of inequality, and that inequality is a product of undermining the RtD, then development policy would benefit from design that is centred on the RtD, rather than only on reactionary downstream interventions.

For instance, in March, 2017 the United Nations declared that 20 million people across four

⁴⁴ John Lynch et al., “Income Inequality and Mortality: importance to health of individual income, psychosocial environment, or material conditions”, *British Medical Journal*, vol. 320, no.7243 (2000), pp.1200-04.

⁴⁵ A.P. Sreeraj and Vamsi Vakulabharanam, “High Growth and Rising Inequality in Kerala since the 1980s”, *Oxford Development Studies*, vol. 44, no.4 (2016), pp. 1–17.

⁴⁶ William Cockerham, *The Social Causes of Health and Disease*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ A/RES/41/128, Article 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Article 2(3).

countries were at the risk of starvation.⁵⁰ Four countries, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen were all at alarmingly high famine warning levels due to extreme inequalities resulting from conflicts, failed governance, and deep insecurity. These four nations have strikingly dissimilar economic and political geographies, yet peoples in each country did not know where their next meal would come from. Beyond environmental volatilities, lacking security and functioning services were paramount in accelerating this crisis, again highlighting how upstream determinants matter to such issues.

What’s more, the RtD matters in this scenario, and to other less extreme development challenges. Even though the international human rights declarations widely intersect, the DRTD “adds value in a number of ways”. First, the DRTD acknowledges the need for equal and urgent attention to all human rights. Second, the DRTD integrates into “the process of development, and as a matter of legal obligation, the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation, accountability and transparency”.⁵¹ The DRTD emphasizes equality as a fundamental right in approaching development. Such focus would allow for better policy responses, and prevention strategies against calamities like famine. Ensuring the RtD always ought to be the outcome of every development policy.

The relationship between poverty, hunger, and inequality on the one hand, and the RtD on the other hand, is not unidirectional. While the former leads to an undermining of the RtD, promotion of the latter also helps address the underlying factors leading to poverty, hunger and inequality. This *inter se* connection is captured adequately by Article 8(1) of the DRTD which stipulates that,

“States should undertake, at the national level, all necessary measures for the realization of the right to development and shall ensure, inter alia, equality of opportunity for all in their access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income. Effective measures should be undertaken to ensure that women have an active role in the development process. Appropriate economic and social reforms should be carried out with a view to eradicating all social injustices.”⁵²

As can be seen, “equality of opportunity for all” in access to “food”, “employment” and “the fair distribution of income” (addressing poverty, hunger and inequality) and indeed “eradicating all social injustices” are inherent enablers of the RtD and simultaneously, are by-products of its violation.

For the 2030 Agenda, the RtD holds an important place in overcoming poverty, hunger, but most importantly, deep inequalities. In order to achieve the SDGs, Nation-States will need to direct their policies and targets towards the RtD, paying particular attention to the value of achieving equality in their outcomes. As mentioned earlier, a great deal of policy on poverty and hunger does not directly deal with the root causes of poverty or hunger, but only on economic growth and

⁵⁰ See: United Nations, *Amid Humanitarian Funding Gap, 20 Million People across Africa, Yemen at Risk of Starvation, Emergency Relief Chief Warns Security Council*, 10 March 2017, available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12748.doc.htm> (accessed on 28 August 2017).

⁵¹ See: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Frequently Asked Questions on the Right to Development*, Fact Sheet No. 37 (Geneva: United Nation, 2016).

⁵² A/RES/41/128, Article 8(1).

democratic transparency.

Operationalizing the RtD for ending poverty, which is the first of the 17 SDGs,⁵³ would require the issue to be approached not by measuring the eradication of poverty through the human development index, the gross domestic product, or other macro-measurements of societies, but through an approach whereby development itself is treated as a human right of entire populations and all individuals, and involves the guarantee of individual earnings. The measurement of life on less than \$1.25/day indicates that deep or extreme poverty can be measured at both macro and micro levels.⁵⁴ By focusing on this indicator, it is then possible to innovate fitting policy solutions through a RtD lens that guarantees an individual’s, and entire population’s, RtD. This could include guaranteed minimal income, employment insurance, pensions, disability insurance plans, universal health care coverage, and even stipend benefits for mothers, young children, and school-aged children. With a RtD focused approach, the potential for overlooking deep structural inequities in policy design fades, although other concerns, such as state-level governance, security, or armed conflicts would all remain important challenges. The 2030 Agenda incorporates the targets to be achieved by States with respect to ending poverty in SDG 1 in the following terms:⁵⁵

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day

1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions

1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance

1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters

It seems clear that unless the RtD is operationalized, fulfillment of the aforesaid targets will continue to be seen merely as generosity and not as duties on States and rights of human beings. States must take action to fulfill SDG 1 and its targets not because sustainable development is a

⁵³ A/RES/70/1, SDG 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid, Target 1.1.

⁵⁵ Note that the “means of implementation” targets under SDG 1 are referred to separately below.

political commitment and an aspirational goal, but because all human beings have the RtD and there is an obligation on all States to fulfill the same. But, beyond that, States also need to fulfill these targets in an equitable manner as warranted by the RtD. As has been pointed out by Mihir Kanade in Chapter 3, SDG 1 now not only expands the coverage to *all* people from the previous threshold of ‘halving the proportion’ under MDG 1, but also explicitly prioritizes the most vulnerable sections of the society, something that was absent under the MDG 1.⁵⁶ A focus on all people and prioritization of the most vulnerable are essential attributes of the RtD. Therefore, for SDG 1 to be successful, these elements of equity need to be combined with a duty on States to address poverty, and in turn, for this to happen, it is important to adopt and operationalize the RtD.

SDG 2 of the 2030 Agenda articulates the targets on ending hunger.⁵⁷

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed

To achieve zero hunger as envisaged under SDG 2, the RtD would also find more fitting measurements and solution strategies than traditional indicators of food security. While national-level food import, export, and production data are important criteria, they may overlook issues of inequality at the regional, community, and even the family level. Regional and community-level

⁵⁶ A/RES/70/1, Goals 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5

⁵⁷ The “mean of implementation” targets under SDG 2 are mentioned separately below.

indicators will provide better estimates of food access than national-level data records, but measuring food security at the family unit level has grown as a popular means to monitor food security. Because the RtD looks at development being a group as well as individual right, it requires going even further to understand more intricate inequalities even within the family unit. Can gender dynamics serve as a means to understanding food security at the local level? Could levels and types of employment, access to property, and access to export markets all serve as other indicators of food access? These are factors that focus development on the needs of individuals, rather than the imagined desires of Nation-States, and with such focus, and through such methods, could hunger be truly eradicated.

SDG 10 is entitled “reduce inequality” and incorporates the following targets:⁵⁸

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

10.1 By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard

10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

10.5 Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations

10.6 Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions

10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

Again, the RtD serves as an important guide in addressing this goal that governs so many other development factors. Traditional inequality measures can overlook power dynamics and factors at the individual level. SDG 10 aims to reduce not just financial inequities, but also inequities in gender, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, origin, or status within a nation. Here, the RtD is needed to ensure that initiatives are aimed at narrowing economic income gaps, and also in transferring power among, and between members of a society. Faster income growth among the poor than upper and middle classes would be one approach to focus on narrowing inequalities between

⁵⁸ Note that the “means of implementation” targets under SDG 10 are mentioned separately below.

economic classes. So too would better capacity building and education opportunities be more readily available to the marginalized. Gender equity in governance institutions, and assistance to activist groups working for better social equality along age, sex, disability, or status lines. In all of these cases, the RtD approaches these development challenges by aiming state-level policy to real, not imagined, individual needs.

As discussed in Chapter 3 by Kanade, the RtD not only encompasses obligations by States internally, but also externally to people in other countries, and when they act through international organizations or within the context of development aid. This duty includes the negative obligation on States not to impede the RtD of others, and also the positive obligation to facilitate the RtD of others. Importantly, the 2030 Agenda recognizes that none of the targets on poverty, hunger or inequality can be fulfilled by States individually, unless the means of implementing those targets are also made available and operationalized. These “means of implementation” targets are articulated not only in SDG 17 generally,⁵⁹ but also in each of the SDGs specifically. The “means of implementation” targets in SDGs 1, 2 and 10 are as follows:

1.a Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions

1.b Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions

2.a Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries

2.b Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round

2.c Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility

10.a Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements

10.b Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African

⁵⁹ A/RES/70/1, Goal 17.

countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes

10.c By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent.

It is evident that the aforesaid targets are not aimed at being fulfilled by States internally only. Rather, they envision mostly external obligations on States to be fulfilled through international cooperation. Unless these “means of implementation” targets are fulfilled, there is no possibility of the other targets in SDG 1, 2 and 10 being fulfilled. As pointed out by Kanade in Chapter 3, the only way the SDGs can be realized is if fulfilling the “means of implementation” is understood as a duty on all States to ensure international cooperation, as is required under the RtD framework.

Concluding thoughts

Poverty is not new, and it impacts every society. Societies with greater inequities fare worse on the whole than societies with greater equity. Poverty persists not because of any economic accident; rather it is maintained through structures of governance and economics. In its worst state, poverty can lead to excessive hunger, suffering and rigid inequity. Often the mechanisms for dealing with deep poverty have been to encourage greater economic growth at the local level. However, increases in monetary values alone may not be enough to escape deep poverty unless some attention is given to the structural hierarchies and class divisions in society.

While the consequences of deep poverty are pervasive in every society, examples exist of Nation-States actively addressing the upstream determinants. The high-income Scandinavian countries are often highly praised for having excellent education and high rates of employment that greatly mitigate issues of inequality. However, Cuba, an economically hobbled country has also addressed poverty through an upstream determinants approach. By focusing on land reforms, universal housing, universal education and universal employment, this economically modest country boasts the best rates of education, health and nutrition in the global South. Certainly, more discussion is warranted for explaining the specificities of the Cuban and the Scandinavian countries’ development experience, but for the purposes of this Chapter it is important to acknowledge how they focused on the root causes of poverty that stem from unemployment and unaffordable housing, rather than approaching poverty through reactionary methods.

Poverty, hunger and inequality are all deeply connected and all are maintained principally through social and political excuses. While there is no panacea for the eradication of poverty and hunger, it is possible to acknowledge that their existence is socially determined and it should invite informed conversations on how to address the root causes that perpetuate it, and to deal directly with them. Insofar as the targets related to poverty, hunger, and inequality in the SDGs are concerned, operationalizing the RtD seems to be the most important step in efforts to effectively implement them.