

## DIAGNOSING POVERTY IN NORTHERN GHANA: INSTITUTIONAL VERSUS COMMUNITY VIEWS

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper attempts a diagnosis of poverty at institutional and community levels. This diagnosis entails an examination and comparison of various articulations of poverty in the formal, official and/or so-called high places of government and global institutions as well as at the grassroots such as households, individuals and communities within northern Ghana. The goal is to foster a better appreciation of the varying articulations of poverty while exploring pedagogical sites for initiating grassroots action. The diagnosis was facilitated through a desk review of institutional documents and as well, onsite interactions involving community discussions, focus group discussions and informal interviews in selected districts of northern Ghana. The diagnosis reveals that while institutions dwell on asset-based or economic analysis of poverty, communities include social, spiritual and physical dimensions in their articulations. Both differences and similarities are uncovered in the process suggesting that for effective poverty alleviation, efforts must involve the adoption of holistic approaches, complex analysis and practical programming as well as center human agency.*

**KEY WORDS:** Community views, Institutional meanings, Poverty analysis, Lived realities, Economic growth.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The World Bank, a multilateral agency that leads policy initiatives in global development, has in recent time made poverty analysis an essential part of its development interventions. This has resulted in an emphasis on special documents, popularly called the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), in its sponsored programs in highly indebted poor countries (HIPC), especially. The centering of poverty in its recent development initiatives has been necessitated by the realization and response to the reality of growing poverty amid so-called economic prosperity.

In the 1999 Annual Report, James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank Group, noted:

The financial toil of the last two years has dealt a blow to the expectations we had for reducing poverty. Just a short time ago, we had confidence that the Interna-

tional Development Goal of halving poverty would be met in the next 20 years in most areas of the world. Today, countries that until recently believed they had turned the tide in the fight against poverty are witnessing its reemergence along with hunger and the human suffering it brings.... We must now draw on the lessons of recent experience to help us reshape our strategies for the future. (World Bank, 1999: 3)

Planned development, as envisaged by the World Bank Group, has been intended to hasten the pace of development in less developed countries but more importantly to reduce poverty and promote growth. For Third World countries, seen to lag behind in the global search for prosperity and modernized living, the World Bank offers various forms of financial assistance in support of their development initiatives. The harsh reality to which President Wolfensohn calls the world's attention has been least expected. Yet, many critical theorists had not only anticipated but also actually cautioned against the attendant alienations and impoverishment (Sen, 1999; Shiva, 1997; Marx, 1971; Frank, 1969). They had contested the globalized agenda of grand scheme development for its utter disregard of local conditions and especially for creating and deepening inequalities.

Critical analysts such as Karl Marx (1971), Louis Althusser (1976) and Gunder Frank (1969) of the old school and Vandana Shiva (1997, 1993), Amartya Sen (1999), Chambers (1997) and Escobar (1995) of the new school, among many others, have continually pointed to the many ways that the globalized agenda has contributed to the worsening of the living conditions of non-West countries and cultures. These critics have been consistent and persistent in asserting that the historical informings of development rooted in a Western and capitalist model was creating vulnerabilities, excluding non-Western cultures and intensifying poverty. Yet, this criticism was unheeded until the global leader, the World Bank, was faced with the harsh reality captured in Wolfensohn's observation above. This eventual realization by the World Bank was to result in major shifts in planned development initiatives.

At the beginning of this third millennium, the world was pushed to focus attention on poverty reduction as a means of accelerating growth and sustaining development. This shift in thinking has been captured in both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the PRSPs. While the entire global world is bound by the MDGs, poorer nations are urged to initiate specific programs that directly further the poverty reduction agenda. In Ghana, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS), which has been in operation since 2002, has been in response to the challenge of deepening poverty after two decades of structural adjustments (Ghana Government/NDPC, 2003).

As a beneficiary of World Bank support for over two decades and a member of the global community, Ghana is bound by the tenets of the PRSPs and MDGs. Reports on these initiatives show some achievements as well as failures (Ghana Government/NDPC, 2004; Dittoh, 2004; Apusigah, 2004). While many of these re-

ports focus on logistics, policy and institutional limitations, very little attention is paid to the question of meaning. Indeed, critics outside institutional assessments continue to raise questions on meanings and framings. Anti-poverty and anti-globalization campaigners continue to challenge the viability of institutionalized agenda such as the MDGs and PRSPs (Mbilinyi, 2004; Antrobus, 2004; Bauman, 1998; Chossoudovsky 1997). Community/rural development workers and rights activists continue to intensify their campaign on development with the people (Kindervatter, 2004; Chambers, 1997; Shiva, 1993).

This paper attempts to further the cause on development framing by focusing on the question of meaning. It seeks to capture and re/present the varied meanings of poverty. It starts with a re/presentation and discussion of institutionalized meanings for comparison with community level meanings. It then draws lessons from both levels (i.e. institutionalized and community) for informing grassroots action on poverty alleviation.

## **2.0 SOME INSTITUTIONALIZED VIEWS ON POVERTY**

Ongoing grand schemes for poverty reduction at the global and national levels, at least during the last two decades have been influenced by the United Nations (UN) and its agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). As the global body with purported responsibility for the wellbeing of world populations, both human and non-human, the UN and its agencies play central roles in leading the struggle to end poverty. Their programs for Third World countries, in the form of structural adjustments, have been framed by an agenda of improving living conditions. In the pursuit of this agenda, however, the UN, especially the World Bank and IMF, stand accused of misplaced programming. Often criticized for promoting a skewed agenda that favors the haves and discriminates against the have-nots, the World Bank and IMF are often blamed for increasing vulnerabilities and intensifying poverty among constituent Third World nations (Apusigah, 2002; McMurtry, 1998; Chossoudovsky, 1998).

In an earlier work, I argue that the development priority of the World Bank and the IMF negates its agenda of improving the conditions of the poor (Apusigah, 2002). I argue that by working within a neo-liberal capitalist economic model, the World Bank shifts from its social responsibility to take on an economic growth agenda that counters its acclaimed intent of poverty reduction. This is so because the economic growth agenda does not pave way for addressing welfare needs. In the process, welfare is portrayed as a burdensome and an unnecessary cost to economic growth, which is profit-oriented rather than welfare-centered. In this paper, I trace the situation to the very framing of World Bank poverty reduction efforts.

In a 1996 Annual Report, the World Bank discusses its own shifts in poverty initiatives. It demonstrates a move "from describing poverty to formulating poverty-reduction strategies and placing these at the center of Country Assistance Strategies

(CAS); and from tracking inputs to judging performance on the basis of outcomes" (World Bank, 1997: 96). While acknowledging the "considerable risks of marginalization, impoverishment, and exclusion," the World Bank continued to work on the premise that "global trends toward trade, financial and technological integration provide an unprecedented opportunity for poverty reduction" (*ibid.*, p. 100). The irony here is that the very program that purports to reduce poverty, also impoverishes, marginalizes and excludes people. It is therefore no doubt that this same report found poverty to be rising in the developing world including India, Europe and Central Asia, Indonesia and Africa. As well, it reports that inequality and urban poverty were rising. In addition, life expectancy gains were at risk and education for the poor was worsening. Whatever happened in the process is any one's guess!

The gloomy picture presented through the World Bank's own assessment of its own development indicators leaves no doubt regarding the inefficacy and uninformed conception of poverty largely in terms of economic growth. The continued emphasis on economic growth through trade, which conditions remain unfair, I argue, results in the unfortunate social costs that the World Bank and the world face. The World Bank's poverty reduction lending for 1999, targeted some specific areas: adjustment, private sector development, emergency assistance, human development, community and rural development, natural resource management, post conflict and urban poverty (World Bank 2000: 9). All targeted areas focus on physical/structural development and service delivery. This is further reflected in its poverty reduction strategy, which focuses on political, material and security bases for economic and social growth.

While more and more the social factor is gaining recognition in World Bank poverty reduction initiatives, it does not seem to be able to place it at the center of its agenda or above its economic growth efforts. Indeed, if economic growth initiatives are causing so much havoc to the greater majority of the world's population (India, Indonesia, Europe, Central America, Africa), why should it still remain central to poverty reduction? If poverty reduction efforts are returning impoverishment, marginalization and exclusion of the majority, why stick to that agenda? The reason is probably not far-fetched as the World Bank is a financial institution. However, that other global initiatives remain trapped in the same economic model remains an open mystery!

Another important institutional definition of poverty is presented in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs, which were supposedly drawn from the joint efforts of the developed and developing worlds, and encompassing all divides, do not escape from the economic entrapment. Yet, one need not seek far for reasons as the final decision fell on so-called "experts from the United Nations Secretariat and IMF, OECD and the World Bank" (UNDP/UNICEF, 2003:3).

Goal One of the MDGs is to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger" (UNDP/UNICEF, 2003: 3). The first of the two set targets, which focuses on poverty, states: "halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day" (*ibid.*). The two indicators for reaching this target are: (i) Proportion of the

population below \$1 a day and (ii) share of poorest quintile in national consumption. It is clear from the target and indicators that the MDGs frame poverty from an economic viewpoint. Issues around consumption, income and expenditure are key denominators. Further explanations showed that sub-Saharan Africa carried the largest percentage of the world's poor during the 1990s. It is estimated that the situation is likely to worsen by 2015. As can be expected, the situation has been attributed to "the region's weak economic performance during the 1990s. While average growth improved in sub-Saharan countries in recent years, the annual average rate for the entire decade was low at 2.1 per cent" (ibid). Gross domestic growth rate, per capita incomes, trade and investments were some of the economic indicators seen to have under performed. As well, issues on political turmoil, civil strife and weather vagaries were acknowledged. The latter were seen as creating unfavorable conditions that impeded economic growth and not the other way round. As noted:

Because the poverty reduction elasticity of growth diminishes as income distribution worsens, high inequality countries will normally need substantially higher growth rates to reduce poverty. Should such levels of inequality persist, the prospects for translating any gains from economic growth into shared prosperity and meaningful poverty reduction will be dim. (UNDP/UNICEF, 2003: 5)

It is ironic to anticipate such high growth in a region that has been plagued with several and varied disasters (natural and artificial) in the last two decades. Weather vagaries, wars, ethnocentrism, civil strife, and structural adjustment are among the many plagues that the Africa region is battling. A significant number of its countries experience negative economic growth rates and its better resource endowed countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Nigeria have the widest unequal income distribution level (UNDP/UNICEF, 2003).

The stark reality of poor economic growth in spite of decades of economic reform packages in the form of structural adjustments led by the World Bank and IMF continue to manifest themselves in terms of the rising poverty, growing inequalities and intensifying vulnerabilities especially among resource poor, women, rural communities and the working class. Yet, even the country papers that were prepared to address country specific issues did not seem to deviate from the tenets of the economic growth model. This meaning is exemplified further in the PRSPs and in the country specific documents such as the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS).

The GPRS is Ghana's response to the global efforts. Unlike the World Bank, which in its 1999 report decides not to define poverty, the GPRS attempts to provide one. It explains: "Poverty is recognized as multi-dimensional with complex interactive and causal relationships between the dimensions....Poverty is defined as unacceptable physiological and social deprivation" (Ghana Government/NDPC 2003: 3). It identifies the causes of poverty to include macro-economic instability, inability to optimize benefits from global economic system, low levels of consumption, limited use of

technology, belief in superstition and myths, as well as powerlessness of the poor and women. Here again, privilege is given to economic issues over social and spiritual issues. Even by using participatory poverty analysis to solicit views on poverty at the community level, efforts were directed at attitudinal change to fit the economic model where resources and services were core indicators. This viewing seemed to have been injected into communities. It is typical of communities to begin to explain poverty in terms of assets and services. However, with tact other equally important views become evident as shown in the following section.

### 3.0 SOME COMMUNITY LEVEL VIEWS ON POVERTY

Working with many communities in northern Ghana during the last decade exposed me to the varied ways that the people view poverty. In their own ways and actions, they explain their conditions in ways that are sometimes consistent but many times removed from the institutionalized articulations captured above. Members of diverse communities talk of poverty as a fact of their lived realities. They explain the circumstances, situations, challenges and difficulties they live through on a daily basis. One thing that remains clear in their various articulations of poverty is the restrictions that it places on them.

In this section, I attempt to relate the viewings and expressions of poverty by these communities. The views presented here were drawn from various interactions held with diverse community members who live in various rural settings in northern Ghana. These views were expressed during community discussions, focus group discussions and informal interviews held in selected communities in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions, which comprise northern Ghana. The views of both women and men are re/presented. The articulations show not just views but also the basic realities of rural living. The views are re/presented in their words and in my words. They are views re/presented in response to the fundamental question: What is poverty? The question arose as a result of what I consider a persistent citing of poverty as an explanation for the problems of rural communities. I sought to understand what they meant by poverty. I sought clarity of the concept especially as the tendency existed for development workers to use/impose institutionalized definitions on rural communities. I wanted to understand how the many communities with whom I have been working conceived and explained their own situation. I was surprised and challenged in many ways. I present these next in words that I understand and which are mere approximations of what I gleaned from the complex ways that they expressed themselves in their own varied languages.

In one community, one man said:

*Poverty is not having an owner. When you are poor, you do not have someone who looks after you. Someone who can take care of your body ache [sickness/disease] and your nighttime problem. Your headaches [challenges/difficulties]. Your heart matters [emotional issues]. If you have a problem and there is no*

*one to get up and roam for you are you not in need? Things happen around you and you sit in darkness, will they not eat you up?*

For this man, poverty is not about wealth or possessions. It is about guidance and protection against the deep things of the world. It is about two things: first, person(s) who can provide protection and second, about protection from and in the spirit world. The first case is about having elder(s) in one's life, who can communicate with the spirit world and provide explanations for misfortune or foresee looming trouble for precaution. It is also about having ancestors who can intervene and intercede on one's behalf in the spirit world and can communicate with them in time of need. The second is about a feeling of security. Knowing that one can depend on an elder(s) or ancestor(s) on matters of the spirit provides one the protection from ill fortune and/or explanation when misfortune occurs. Further discussions reveal that when sickness, death, miscarriage and bareness occur, it is important for people in this community to find out the reasons in order to take precautions to stop a re-occurrence.

Another frequent response to the question during the varied interactions was "someone who has no people." Although similar to the first in terms of its emphasis on dependability, it was different in terms of its emphasis on physical issues: number of family members, resources available and/or resourcefulness of family members. In the first case, not having people means not having heirs or a large family. A middle-aged man explained: *if you have no children or sons, you have nobody. Who will survive the family when you are gone?* At another level, poverty as lack of people refers to family size. The elderly were more likely to think in terms of having many sons and daughters as well as grandchildren and great grandchildren.

A second case, which relates to resources although similar to conventional expressions of poverty, differed in terms of the kind and purpose of the resource. The emphasis on resources by these northern Ghanaian peoples referred more to cultural resources needed for building families. This was not necessarily a case of food, shelter, clothing and education as further discussions showed. It was about the ability to expand and survive the family: increasing and/or having people. It was about having the cultural resource to marry and keep a woman or women who will bear children to increase the family. This involves being able to meet the demands of courtship and dowry. For the Frafra, Kasena, Nankani and Kusasi man this entails being able to afford kola, guinea fowls and tobacco for courtship and cattle for dowry on marriage. For the Dagaaba, the dowry item will be cowries. For the Builsa and Gonja, it might mean not being able to fulfill the demands of courtship as dowry is relatively inexpensive and does not entail payment of capital items such as cattle and cowries.

A third viewing of poverty in relation to resources is qualitative. It refers to having people who are resourceful and supportive. The elderly, especially women, tend to express poverty in this way. They refer to having children who are responsible and caring, and as such can provide support in their old age. They do not need to have lots of wealth and property but should care enough to act to support their aged par-

ents. They should have children who can play with their grand parents and keep them busy. They should have a wife or wives who will produce children to inherit them and care for aged parents. They should be able to organize a decent burial and perform funerals. Funerals pave way for the deceased to become an object of worship, whose duty is to plead on behalf of and guide the surviving family members. An elderly woman said: *"if you do not have somebody who will perform your funeral you remain outside and tasty. You can not join your ancestors to drink water."* The people believe that unless one's funeral is performed one remains separated from the ancestors and cannot join them. One hovers round and cannot enter the ancestral home to become part of the ancestral spirits or share in libations and sacrifices. The performance of the funeral deifies the dead and makes it possible for them to become ancestral spirits.

The later refers to social conditions with religious or spiritual import. The elderly, women and men, of northern Ghana who maintain their traditional ancestral worship systems, view their wellbeing in terms of their continued existence even after they have passed on to the spiritual world. It is very common among the Gurunsi and Nankani to refer to wealthy persons (*tib-sa*<sup>1</sup> or *na-ba*) without children as worthless (*bon-zanga*). On the other hand, they refer to anyone with many children as someone of worth. For these groups and many northern ethnic groups, one's worth lies in not just possessions or assets but also people (heirs) who can utilize it in one's lifetime and beyond. This is a futuristic viewing of wealth and being. If poverty generally describes one's state of being, then for these peoples continued being, defined as longevity and/or immortality of individuals through their heirs, is worth striving for rather than assets and material things.

Yet another articulation of poverty was typical of women, especially widows. Widows were quick to say they were poor because their husbands had died. They did not have anyone to depend on for support. These women were not necessarily worse off than other community members regarding having children or physical assets. It is more an articulation of the loss of the head of household whose traditional role is to take care of the physical as well as the spiritual needs of the wife and children. Some widows would choose new husbands for such protection.

One woman said:

*When my child does not sleep I have no one to consult for me. I have to go and tell the elder and if he decides then he will go and consult. I can't even tell him to! If he goes to consult and my matters come up and he is happy he will tell me. Otherwise, I will be roaming in darkness.*

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, 'tib-sa' means having weight(heavy) while 'na-ba' refers to chief. One has weight or is heavy because they have many people around them, who can continue their lineage and take care of them in time of need. They are chiefs, again, because they have people around them



For women in these communities, who customarily cannot consult spirit mediums, spiritual nourishment is as important as physical wellbeing. It is this and many other patriarchal binds that determine life's meaning and worth. Their ability to fend or not for themselves is not the question. Their lived reality of loss becomes the defining factor.

Poverty has also been viewed as a condition or state of disability. In this case, poverty is expressed as a state that incapacitates its victim(s). It makes it impossible for victims to participate in activities expected of responsible persons. A young woman expressed this as follows: "... *when your friends are going out you can not go with them.*" For this woman, not being able to join the local women's group made it impossible for her to move with them. She explained that she could not afford to pay the dues and buy the society's tee shirts and cloths. In that sense, she was isolated from her friends and fellow women. She also explained that due to poverty her husband was unable to support her to perform her mother's funeral in a deserving matter. She could not carry the numerous basins of malt, pots of oil and baskets of bambara and blackeye beans that her sisters who were married into richer families did. She said her natal family did not accord her the same respect or value her contribution. In this case, the social exclusions that she suffered more than her assets were of greater concern.

Throughout my interactions among the various ethnic groups, I also could identify a particular category of community members whose view of poverty was close to institutionalized definitions. The category will include schooled elite, returned migrants and roving traders. This category, who due to their education and exposure to life outside the rural communities and were likely to act as liaisons between communities and visitors, viewed poverty through an economic lens as one of deprivation. They articulated this in terms of the lack of modernizing amenities such as electrical power, piped water, recreational facilities, modern buildings, schools, hospitals and clinics and tarred roads. They attributed the lack of resources or poor quality of such facilities to an external force especially the national and/or local government. They tended to argue that the member of parliament, assemblyperson, district assembly or ruling government had denied them their fair share of development. They also readily compared the state of resources in the community with that of urban centers. While those who fall outside this category might speak of the lack of such modernizing facilities if challenged, they were more likely to attribute this situation to their poverty and inability to provide them. In this second case, poverty begets poverty. That is to say because one is poor one is poor. This can be stated in two ways. The first one can be stated as follows: Due to poverty, one lives under impoverished conditions and lives the life of the poor. This first case is a positive statement of how one's condition or state of being reflects one's lifestyle. In the second case, the situation is couched in the negative: due to one's poverty one is unable to afford the good things of life and the kind of life style enjoyed by the haves.

For this category of community members poverty was deprivation. They argue that poor people are often denied their rights as governments (local and national) fail to

live up to their duties and responsibilities. This line of argument, which focuses on rights and responsibilities, shows that the conditions of the poor would have been better if those in authority lived up to their responsibilities. Basically, they argue that those in authority have the responsibility to provide those things that enable citizens to enjoy a good quality of life. The onus is put on governments to provide much needed social amenities and services in communities. Governments become the holders of the key to poverty reduction and elimination. Indeed, this thinking also underpins the many poverty eradication, alleviation and reduction efforts of the many and varied governmental and non-governmental programs and projects for rural communities. While rights and responsibilities must be made an important part of discourse and actions on poverty, it is also the case that assigning responsibility to external agents is limiting and often defeatist or self-defeating.

A pleasant surprise in my search for clarity on poverty was the interesting dynamic between articulations of wealth and poverty. Among the largely commercial farmers of the eastern corridor of northern Ghana, community members readily counted the number of yam tubers harvested as well as cows, grinding mills, type of housing, farming tool and cars owned. As participants in the capitalist markets, these typical farming communities counted their wealth by the capital acquisitions and production levels. This is typical of the economic model that frames institutional meanings related above. Yet, when asked about the poor, there is a shift in the indicators used. They tended to draw on local descriptors. When asked who was poor, the popular response was those who cannot feed themselves, who have small farm sizes and cannot take care of their family. The communities attributed the cause of poverty to the lack of farmland. For them, the small farm size made it impossible for poor people to cultivate large quantities of yams for sale to generate cash to acquire capital resources and improve living conditions. As well, the small farm size made it impossible for poor people to cultivate sufficient foodstuff to feed their families. For these, largely Konkomba farmers who had settled on Nanumba lands for the purposes of farming, land was the main determinant of one's living conditions.

The women among these largely farming communities, however, thought a little differently from the men. They attributed the cause of poverty among women to their status as women who support their husbands. They did not however see this as a gender-based discrimination. Some gender work needed here. They accepted their traditional roles as wives whose duty it is to work with their husbands for the maintenance of their families. They also thought that their inability to engage in some income generating activities was hindering their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

#### **4.0 LESSONS FOR POVERTY REDUCTION**

Four key areas of learning are possible for agents leading the process of poverty reduction in northern Ghana. The greatest of them all is that poverty is real in our communities. Hence, efforts to alleviate, reduce and/or eliminate poverty must learn from

the multiple perspectives that communities present on their conditions and situations. I propose that institutions and agencies need to use holistic approaches, center human agency, engage complex analyses and prioritize practical programming.

#### **4.1 Holistic approaches**

A comparison between community views and institutional views shows similarities and differences as well as parallels and intersections. Yet, what is clear is that poverty has diverse meanings. Individuals and groups live through particular conditions and experience phenomena differently as such they will interpret their experiences and conditions the way that they know and understand them. It will therefore be out of place to single out one conception, articulation or experience as representing a common ground for action. Indeed, the likely effect of adopting such a grand scheme approach will be the failure of programmes to achieve desired results.

In anticipation of the multiplicity of experiences and conditions, those acting toward poverty alleviation and reduction will need to adopt holistic approaches. As can be gleaned from above, a holistic or inclusive approach needs to include the physical and non-physical, rational and irrational, basic and complex as well as material and immaterial aspects of livelihoods.

#### **4.2 Human agency**

At the core of action is an agent that moves, rationalizes, perceives and imputes meaning. That agent experiences as well as affects experiences through actions and inactions. This situation presupposes that for any change to be effective that agency must be exercised. If the import of human agency can be depended on then it can be expected that efforts to alleviate poverty would center that agency. The people whose lived realities conjure that characterization and whose lives are expected to be affected by poverty alleviation and reduction initiatives need to be at the center of the initiatives. Indeed, the first GPRS document, which expires this year, understood this need even if response to such knowledge was nominal.

The authors of GPRS claim to have adopted participatory poverty analysis to determine the poverty situation in Ghana. Various consultations were held with selected groups and levels to solicit involvement. In spite of its own problems, this was a clear demonstration of an appreciation of the need for human, and especially local, agency. By local agency, I mean that those who are directly affected by poverty must be involved actively not only in analysis but also in initiating and negotiating actions toward change.

There is no denying the fact that those who live under subhuman conditions of poverty and experience states of deprivation and ill-being deserve better living conditions. They have the right to demand for and obtain support to change those conditions. They also have a responsibility to not just make those demands but also exer-

cise the right to make change happen. It is a two-way deal with demands on both local and extra-local agents.

### **4.3 Complex analysis**

Another important learning from the discussion above is the need for a shift from the simple analysis that characterizes poverty analysis to a complex one. As can be expected, a simplistic analysis can only result in simplistic results that lack an appreciation of the complexities that characterize disadvantage and vulnerability. The tendency of adopting linear analysis often results in shallow meanings that can only support the superficial initiatives. However, by adopting complex analysis it is possible to engage covert and overt, isolated and systemic as well as tangible and intangible dimensions of poverty. Such analysis facilitates an appreciation of the multiple sites, myriad contexts and diverse perspectives that can engender effective practice. It results in the deepening of meanings for beginning to appreciate poverty as a lived reality.

### **4.4 Practical programming**

The discussions above have involved an effort to diagnose poverty at two levels: institutional and community level. This has resulted in meanings that are similar in some ways and different in others. At the core of the analysis is the fact that various stakeholders in the struggle against poverty articulate it in the ways that they know and/or live it. This makes the question of meaning an important element in efforts to alleviate or reduce poverty.

The learning from the diagnosis demonstrates that an understanding and appreciation of poverty requires a deep and complex analysis. However, to effect change one needs to move beyond mere analysis. One needs informed knowledge for an appreciation of the phenomenon. Above all, there is the need to adopt practical programming strategies that foster the operationalization and implementation of knowledge and learning. More importantly, in programming one needs all the requisite resources, human and material, for the effective implementation of knowledge gained through analysis.

## **5.0 ACTING ON LEARNING**

The discussions above show that poverty is a complex social phenomenon that affects real people. It shows that those that live through poverty are better positioned to analyze and give meaning to their experiences. It demonstrates that while institutions construct poverty in ways that are assets- and or economic-based, communities move beyond economics and assets to include social, spiritual and physical needs. Hence, efforts at poverty alleviation should move from the institutions to include community level actors if they are to be successful.

The diagnosis also shows that the differences and similarities in meanings of poverty between institutions and communities present many lessons for acting to improve the conditions of those considered poor. Whether poverty is material or immaterial, whether the onus is exogenous or endogenous, the one key issue is that poverty is a real experience of many of the communities of northern Ghana. These communities, which often have to work within frameworks defined and shaped by external forces, have their own ways, varied and diverse, of conceiving their conditions. Institutions and agencies also have mandates and responsibilities towards these communities for sustaining their livelihoods. This then provides a common ground for dialogue and action. The imperative is for various actors to adopt holistic approaches, complex analysis, practical programming as well as center human agency in all initiatives at all times.

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