

A STUDY ON POVERTY CONCEPTS AND PERSPECTIVES: CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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ABSTRACT

The concept of poverty is subjective and it varies in many perspectives based on the indicators used. The objective of the study is to determine the concept and definition of poverty through exploring the collection of poverty definitions from different sources in order to set its own standardized of operational poverty definitions. This exploratory study will be based on qualitative research methodology. The output of study provides with a clear concept of poverty definition.

Keywords: Poverty concept; poverty definition

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Poverty hampers the development of any country where a section of the population is being economically marginalized. This poverty issue has been giving impact on people, who are bearing with the living condition that does not meet the minimum level of standard or acceptable conditional measurement. Additionally, different definition creates obstacles to the insight for the understanding of poverty issues and finding the best possible solution. As a result, theoretical and practical aspects of poverty eradication-related activities seem unpractical and theoretically unsound in many circumstances.

Moreover, the incidence of poverty at individual and community level has increased despite of the technology advancement in the modern society. That is, the poverty issue is unexpected in the midst of technology advancement whereby food production is four times as compared to the need of world's population. Many arguments have been put forward to describe the poverty issue as well as to predict the future trends of poverty incidence.

On the other hand, the poverty of definition has always been debated by different set of technical and theoretical assumptions. Those assumptions are made for various socio-political reasons whereby rational and logical explanations are intermingled together to adapt the requirement and needs of various stakeholders. As such, different definition should be accepted accordingly by considering the local context, political, demographic and economical the needs of the poor. The next section argues the importance to understand the concept of poverty and different perspectives in the context of this research.

2.0 CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Generally, poverty is defined as an inability to access resources in order to enjoy a minimal or acceptable living. This is in line with Black (2002) that poverty is defined as an inability to afford an adequate standard of consumption. On the other hand, Mat Zin (2011) describes that poverty is concerned with case and generic theories of poverty. According to case theories of poverty, individuals who are unable to support themselves and to afford the basic needs without the assistance are considered living in poverty. For instance, older people, handicapped people, drug addicts and mentally ill persons are included among case-poverty. According to generic theories of poverty, poverty is explained by macro economy problems such as inadequate employment opportunities, low demand and low national income (less developed country).

United Nation (UN) defined poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities, which is a violation of human dignity. In other words, it is suggested that people are poor due to lack of the basic capacity to participate effectively in society. For instance, any person not having enough resources to feed a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living and not having access to credit.

United Nations Development Programme describes poverty as a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Meanwhile, the World Bank (2011) suggests that poverty includes low incomes, the inability to acquire basic goods and services necessary for survival, low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life.

In Malaysia, the definition of hard core poverty is whereby a household income is half of the poverty line or less. The poverty line is the chosen minimum level of income or consumption, which any household income fallen below the minimum level is considered as poor. In other words, the critical threshold point represents the minimum "acceptable" income or consumption level at which individuals are able to achieve a minimum standard of living to maintain health and well-being.

The definition of minimum standard is referred to the purchasing power parity (PPP) of those surveyed. However, the measurement to maintain the minimum "acceptable" standards of living normally varies from country to country. The concept of absolute poverty and hardcore poverty is used in the implementation of poverty eradication programs (Mat Zin, 2011).

3.0 PERSPECTIVE OF POVERTY

The United Nation (UN) suggested two broad concepts of poverty, absolute poverty and relative poverty that are being used by statistical agencies and researchers. The concept of absolute poverty is defined as the minimum set of resources a person needs to survive meanwhile the concept of relative poverty is a

measurement of the resources and living conditions of part of the population in relation to others. Specifically, absolute poverty refers to a person who lacking of basic human needs, which included clean and fresh water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter. On the other hand, relative poverty is described as income inequality, which individual's yearly income and not takes into account of total wealth. Table 1 summarizes the perspectives of the poverty in general.

Table 1: The General Perspectives of Poverty

PERSPECTIVE	DEFINITION	DIMENSION
Relative poverty	Lacking a usual or socially acceptable level of resources or income as compared with others within a society or country.	Economic income
Absolute poverty	Lacking in basic human needs, which commonly includes clean and fresh water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter.	Economic income
Hardcore Poverty	The Malaysian government introduced the concept of hardcore poverty to identify the poorest of the poor. A household is considered in the hardcore poverty group if its income is half of the poverty line or less. The concept of absolute poverty and hardcore poverty is used in the implementation of poverty eradication programs (Mat Zin, 2011).	Half of the poverty line or less
United Nation	Denial of choices and opportunities, lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. This includes the insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities, expose to violence, living in marginal or fragile environments.	Socio-economic access
World Bank	Pronounced deprivation in well-being, low incomes, inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life.	Socio-economic access and human rights
Economics	Low standard of living, deprivation in the way of life because of insufficient resources to avoid such deprivation, both a low standard of living and a low income.	Access to resources and opportunity to create uplift living standard, economic income
Sociology	Denial of social right that relates to societal access, in the form of political and economic rights, freedom to choose and practice social rights. Deprivation of	Access to social variables, dignity, quality of life, human right

	economic resources those are required for dignified participation in society (Williamson & Reutter, 1999).	
Psychology	No definition (Halik, 2006).	Avoiding stigmatization
Politics	An individual's inability to affect change in their lives, disempowered by the circumstances, most of which, unfortunately, are not of their own making (Nyasulu, 2010), denial of meaningful participation in different development programs that would otherwise helping to develop and become self-reliant (Nyasulu, 2010).	Freedom, representation, violation of human rights
Health – World Health Organization (WHO)	Undermining a range of key human attributes, including health, exposure to greater personal and environmental health risks, less well nourished, less information and less able to access health care, thus higher risk of illness and disability. Illness can reduce household savings, lower learning ability, reduce productivity, lead to a diminished quality of life, thereby perpetuating or even increasing poverty.	Access to health facilities, subsistence and adequate nutrition, health related information

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

There are three basic concepts pertaining to poverty, which have been adopted by Malaysian government. These are absolute poverty, absolute hardcore poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty has been regarded, as a condition in which the gross monthly income of a household is insufficient to purchase minimum needs. A poverty line income (PLI) is established and used based on the basic costs of minimum food basket to maintain household members in good nutritional health and other basic needs such as clothing and footwear, rent, fuel and power, transportation and communications, health care, education and recreation. On the other hand absolute hardcore poverty has been regarded as a condition in which the gross monthly income of a household is less than of PLI. Lastly, in regard to relative poverty, this concept is linked to the notion of income disparity between groups. That is, there is no single standard in poverty measurement and also definition of poverty. This has implications for studies that attempt to compare poverty in different kinds of society.

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