

# Poverty Reduction and Policy Regimes Thematic Paper

## Social Movements and Poverty in Developing Countries

*Anthony Bebbington*



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Civil Society and Social Movements  
Programme Paper Number 32  
October 2010

United Nations  
Research Institute  
for Social Development



This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Programme Paper has been produced with the support of UNRISD core funds. UNRISD thanks the governments of Denmark, Finland, Mexico, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom for their core funding.

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## Acronyms

<b>AIDSESP</b>	Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana ( <i>Association of Indigenous Peoples for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle</i> )
<b>ALCA</b>	Area de Libre Comercio en las Américas ( <i>Free Trade Area of the Americas/FTAA</i> )
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>APCI</b>	Agencia Peruana de Cooperación Internacional ( <i>Peruvian Agency for International Cooperation</i> )
<b>CBO</b>	community-based organization
<b>CCP</b>	Confederación Campesino de Perú ( <i>Peruvian Peasant Confederation</i> )
<b>CNA</b>	Confederación Nacional Agraria ( <i>National Agrarian Confederation</i> )
<b>CONACAMI</b>	Confederación Nacional de Comunidades del Perú Afectadas por la Minería ( <i>Confederation of Communities Affected by Mining</i> )
<b>Conveagro</b>	Convención Nacional de Agro Peruano ( <i>National Convention for Peruvian Agriculture</i> )
<b>FTA</b>	free trade agreement ( <i>Tratado de Libre Comercio/TLC</i> )
<b>FTAA</b>	Free Trade Area of the Americas ( <i>Area de Libre Comercio en las Américas/ALCA</i> )
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MAS</b>	Movimiento al Socialismo
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NSDF</b>	National Slum Dwellers Federation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>SDI</b>	Shack/Slum Dwellers International
<b>SEWA</b>	Self-Employed Women's Association
<b>SMO</b>	social movement organization
<b>SPARC</b>	Society for the Promotion of Area Research Centre
<b>TLC</b>	Tratado de Libre Comercio ( <i>free trade agreement/FTA</i> )
<b>US</b>	United States

## Acknowledgements

This paper draws heavily on two research projects supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The first of these is titled Social Movements and Poverty (RES 167-25-0170) with more information available at [www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/socialmovements](http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/socialmovements). The second is titled Conflicts over the Countryside: Civil Society and the Political Ecology of Rural Development in the Andean Region (RES-051-27-0191), with more information at [www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/andes](http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/andes). I wish to acknowledge the collaboration with, and work of, Diana Mitlin, Leonith Hinojosa, Denise Humphreys Bebbington, Mari Burneo, Martin Scurrah, Claudia Bieliech and Jan Mogaladi on those projects. The paper also draws on a writing project with Sam Hickey and Diana Mitlin (see Bebbington et al. 2008a). I am grateful to Peter Utting and Rebecca Buchholz for orientation, and to Yusuf Bangura, Shahra Razavi, Martin Scurrah, Peter Utting and two anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier drafts.

## Summary/Résumé/Resumen

### *Summary*

Poverty and inequality are both products and producers of the prevailing relationships of power in a society. By many definitions, social movements are understood as questioning the nature and exercise of power in society. As such they also play roles in challenging relationships of poverty and inequality. This paper explores some of these roles.

The paper first discusses characteristics of social movements – their motivations, emergence and strategies. Languages of justice and rights are far more prominent in social movements than are languages of poverty reduction. Movements rarely take on the mantle of “being poor” as an identity-based grievance, and few movement leaders think of themselves or their bases in this way. Indeed, many movements argue that a policy focus on poverty is depoliticizing and diverts attention from structures of inequality and exclusion.

While this does not mean that movements are irrelevant to poverty, it does imply that to bring the two themes together requires a particular framing of poverty (as more than income-based), of the causes of poverty (as rooted, ultimately, in relationships of power), and of policy (as determined, ultimately, by political processes in which movements are one of many actors). It is from this starting point that the paper argues that movements are in fact of great relevance to discussions of poverty reduction. This is so both because they challenge dominant ways in which poverty is understood, and because their own actions suggest alternative pathways toward the reduction of poverty and inequality.

As a heuristic, the paper discusses these relationships through combining livelihoods frameworks and a simple state/market/civil society framework. Livelihoods frameworks help to consider poverty in terms of material well-being, power and meaning/cultural identity, and approach the causes of poverty in terms of access to, and control over, assets and the institutional and policy arrangements that structure people’s possibilities. The state/market/civil society frameworks help frame the policies and institutional components of livelihoods frameworks as products of the interactions and power relations among actors operating in these three spheres. These same interactions and power relationships determine the dominant discourses which shape livelihoods and policy in a more general sense. This combined framework makes social movements and power relationships endogenous to livelihoods and poverty. It also helps map the different points at which movements might interact with poverty dynamics. Indeed, one advantage of the livelihoods approach is that it combines both production and consumption (or production and reproduction) within a single analytical framework. The paper therefore organizes its discussion of movements and poverty around this distinction between production and consumption. On the production side, the paper discusses how movements might interact with both incremental and abrupt shifts in livelihood security, with questions of employment and with the relationships between the macroeconomy and public investment in poverty reduction. On the consumption side, the paper focuses on the links between movements and collective consumption, with an emphasis on housing, shelter, infrastructure and services. Cases are drawn from Bolivia, India, Peru and South Africa.

In the domains of both production and consumption, movements pursue a range of strategies. At the less contentious end of the spectrum, these strategies include direct provisioning as well as co-production with public agencies. More contentious are those strategies that involve negotiation and lobbying, and at the most contentious end are strategies involving outright protest and direct action. Choice of strategy, its relative success and its influence on poverty and inequality vary depending on the context, on the capacities of the movement and on the political regime. As a very general pattern, however, it appears that movement politics are more contentious around questions of production than of consumption, and under political regimes with which movements clearly have an oppositional relationship. More generally, movement-

state interactions appear to be most contentious when movements call into question and challenge basic rules that underlie the way that both economy and society are organized. While states are more likely to renegotiate particular projects or areas of expenditure, they are far less inclined to cede ground on basic rules and principles (for instance, principles related to property ownership, stability of contracts to overseas investors, taxation rates and so on).

Historical analogy would suggest that sustained poverty reduction has come from system-wide changes, many of which are institutional in character. Such changes include, for instance, the establishment of taxation systems that redistribute from profits and wages to public investment in services; long-term increases in real wages; and a broadening of access to entitlements that come with participation in the formal economy. In societies of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there is reason to argue that many such institutions have emerged at least partly as a result of the mobilization and negotiation conducted by broad-based social organizations existing outside the state and political parties. Indeed, one of the most important effects of movements is to induce the creation of new public institutions that contribute to poverty reduction and that favour a certain evening out of power relationships in society. In this sense, just as social movements are endogenous to livelihood, so they are also to state formation. Understood this way, there is little choice but to recognize their importance for poverty reduction.

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### **Résumé**

La pauvreté et l'inégalité sont à la fois produits et producteurs des rapports de force existant dans une société. De nombreuses définitions des mouvements sociaux font état d'une contestation de la nature et de l'exercice du pouvoir dans la société. Cette contestation les conduit aussi à remettre en cause les relations de pauvreté et d'inégalité. Ce document approfondit certains des rôles qu'ils jouent dans ce sens.

L'auteur traite d'abord des caractéristiques des mouvements sociaux—leurs motivations, leur naissance et leurs stratégies. Le discours de la justice et des droits y est beaucoup plus répandu que celui de la réduction de la pauvreté. Il est rare que les mouvements arborent le manteau de la pauvreté comme une revendication identitaire et rares en sont les dirigeants qui se conçoivent comme pauvres ou perçoivent leur base de cette manière. En fait, de nombreux mouvements font valoir que des politiques axées sur la pauvreté dépolitisent les structures d'inégalité et d'exclusion et détournent d'elles l'attention.

Cela ne veut pas dire que les mouvements soient étrangers à la pauvreté mais cela implique que la conjonction des deux thèmes impose une présentation particulière de la pauvreté (qui n'est pas seulement celle des causes) de ses causes (la pauvreté ressort en dernière analyse de

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