

# **International Academic Seminar on Poverty and the Poor in the Arab Maghreb November 26-28, 2015**

## **Concept Paper**

Since the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals by the UN in 2000, ending extreme poverty has been a priority for development programs internationally. The global data available to decision-makers and researchers supports the view that achievements have been made toward this goal, and that poverty has lessened over the last two decades in many parts of the world previously thought to be eternal victims of extreme poverty and chronic disease. Anti-poverty programs, however, have not been wholly successful and their outcomes remain subject to doubt, particularly with regard to Africa, where the number of the poor *rose* from 210 million in 1981 to 415 million in 2011. This progress must thus come to be understood in the context of the many obstacles that remain in the total elimination of poverty. Indeed, some 2.1 billion people worldwide still live on an average income of two dollars per day.

In North Africa, development models adopted by states some half century after their independence have been unable to respond either well or permanently to the life needs of their populations. Poverty, the absence of social justice, unemployment, and diverse forms of precariousness and frustration led Tunisia to protests in 2010, when huge numbers of deprived and marginalized young people rebelled against their condition and condemned the oppression and indifference of the authorities that led to it. These protests spread to other Arab countries, particularly Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, removing despotic regimes and weakening the regimes in other states. Academic research has confirmed that poverty is a phenomenon with general shared features as well as specific and local factors from geography and demography. The protests confirmed that poverty and social problems pose a direct challenge—even a threat—to the political stability of states.

This seminar seeks to reach a nuanced understanding of poverty as a phenomenon and its “perplexing” spread in North Africa. It seeks to encourage the exchange of expertise between researchers in the social and human sciences via a multi-disciplinary approach. It also seeks new and innovative ways to describe, analyze, and understand poverty, and to foster a critical examination of the techniques, methods, and concepts relied on to approach the question of poverty and its reduction.

To achieve this, the seminar will take up three themes:

- **Methodology: Approaches and Measurement**

This theme will investigate the indices used by researchers and policymakers today to measure and describe poverty. How, for example, does considering per capita income, the proportion of people in precarious or unsuitable employment, or their numbers, gender issues, the position of women in the workforce, child labor, regional variation in terms of access to basic services (education, health, welfare, a decent environment, housing, infrastructure, drinking water, etc.) change how poverty is evaluated?

Since international bodies began relying on the Human Development Index (HDI) rather than GDP, GNP, and per capita income to measure the economic and social prosperity of countries, markedly more attention has been given to poverty, but a number of questions remain. How trustworthy are the tools for measuring, describing, and assessing poverty? Does understanding poverty require a reconceptualization and re-evaluation of the technical methodologies used? How can researchers and policy makers create a space of openness around the subject of poverty, and best share developing knowledge?

#### • **Poverty and Public Policy**

The phenomenon of poverty cannot be isolated from economic or social policies or indeed from the form of governance adopted by states. Globalization, international economic exchanges, and the growing link between the local, regional, and global, all affect the strategies and policies formulated to fight poverty. How was poverty affected by the shift of some states in the Arab Maghreb from command economies into market economies? Does democracy—viewed as a form of governance—create more opportunities than despotism to fight poverty and establish just and comprehensive development? Which social groups are the most threatened by poverty? Are women more vulnerable to poverty than men, for example? What are the features of the poor? Who is responsible? Do we understand the poor as individuals or groups? Are they the responsibility of the state or something else?

Focusing attention on poverty does not mean forgetting about the poor. The poor have to live it and suffer entire lives without hope of escaping it. Therefore, it is necessary to research the individual life courses of the poor, and understand the ways in which the poor live poverty. What are the cultural references that form their social bonds with others? Is there an archetypal poor person? Finally, we ask about the ability of work, in its various and new forms, to liberate people from the crucible of poverty.

#### • **New Representations and Forms of Poverty**

Limiting interest in the poor to the attempt to know their characteristics, describe their individual and collective paths, and write their particular or common history undoubtedly makes it possible to define these characteristics and create data. However, this approach may

obscure poverty as an individual path and collective phenomenon. Poverty changes over time and depends on transformations in the circumstances of life and the qualities of social identity. It is usually accompanied by precariousness, exclusion, and loss of human dignity. Research in the fields of sociology, ethnology, psychology, history, anthropology, economics, philosophy, and others can help to examine these overlapping questions. These disciplines provide the necessary tools to explore fixed and changing representations or cultural references, and analyze the role of shared values in the perception of poverty and the representations that people create around it over time.

### **Conditions for Participation**

- Language of the seminar: Arabic, French, or English.
- Any verbal intervention should be accompanied by a written summary in a second language.
- Proposals submitted should include the following: name and title of researcher(s), title of the paper, theme concerned, email address, position, institutional affiliation, and short CV.
- Abstracts should be no longer than 400 words. Each abstract should identify the problem being addressed, outline the methodology of the proposed research, list keywords, and include a brief bibliography.

### **Dates**

- Deadline for submission of proposals: **July 15, 2015**
- The academic board will communicate acceptance, suggestions for amendments, or rejection by August 20, 2015
- Deadline for submission of full interventions: October 31, 2015
- Seminar to be held in Tunis: November 26-28, 2015
- The proceedings of the seminar will be published subsequently.

### **Important Remarks**

- Proposals should be submitted to [carep.tn@gmail.com](mailto:carep.tn@gmail.com).
- Questions should be sent to [henda.carep@gmail.com](mailto:henda.carep@gmail.com).
- Flights to and from Tunis, transport from the airport to the hotel, and accommodation for four nights (November 25-28, 2015) in Tunis will be provided to participants. Anything additional is at the participant's own expense.
- Participants are expected to attend all the days of the seminar.