

Plenary roundtable/panel debate:  
**The Labyrinths of Poverty and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean -  
Poverty Research: from Theory to Policy.**

**Time:** Monday 11 August 2008, 14.00-18.00

**Organizers:** Bergen Summer Research School (BSRS), in cooperation with the CLACSO-CROP programme on poverty studies

**Aim:** Giving an interdisciplinary and comparative analysis of the complex relationship between *poverty* and *inequality* in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a critical look at how poverty research does or can (or does not or cannot) influence pro-poor policy in this regional context.

What is the state-of-the-art with respect to theories about poverty and inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean? How do these theories relate to empirical data and research? Are the results from such research relevant for pro-poor policies in the region at all? Are they policy oriented enough? Have we reached the point where it is possible to seriously evaluate the links between academic research and policy (i.e. does it exist enough “evidence” to implement specific solutions)? And if so, what are the obstacles? Are the links between research and the links between inequality and poverty sufficiently demonstrated? Or does this particular perspective challenge dominant power structures too much and thus being ignored by policy makers? These are some of the questions this panel will engage with.

The links between research and policy are often discussed at international conferences and meetings addressing social issues. One example can be found in the 2006 statement from the *Buenos Aires Declaration*. The document claims

“...that better use of rigorous social science can lead to more effective policies and outcomes. Such use requires strengthening linkages between the social sciences and policies for social and economic development. *For the knowledge that the social sciences seek is precisely the knowledge that policy needs.* The world needs new forms of interaction between social scientists and policy actors – and innovative spaces to make them possible.”<sup>1</sup>

But is that so? What type of social science serve policy making? There are cognitive reasons – as well as political – that it is only economics and economic social science offers what policy needs. How these themes influence the relations between poverty and inequality<sup>2</sup> – and their undeniable links – deserves a thorough examination due to their impact on social, economic and political issues.

In the literature Latin America and the Caribbean are usually held to be the most unequal regions of the world.<sup>3</sup> Further, the relative high levels of poverty in the hemisphere are also well documented. According to a 2007 ECLAC report

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<sup>1</sup> “Buenos Aires Declaration calling for a new approach to the social science – policy nexus”, in UNESCO/MOST Final Report INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON THE SOCIAL SCIENCE – POLICY NEXUS, Argentina and Uruguay, 20-24 February 2006, p.15. (Emphasis added.)  
<<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001459/145939e.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> Please notice that poverty and inequality should here be understood broader than just income poverty and inequality of income.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Huber, E., F. Nielsen, J. Pribble, and J. D. Stephens. "Politics and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean." *AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW*. 71. 6 (2006): 943-963, and Teichman, J. "Redistributive Conflict and Social Policy in Latin America." *WORLD DEVELOPMENT -OXFORD-*. 36. 3 (2008): 446-460.

“...estimates indicate that 36.5% of Latin America’s population (195 million people) were poor and 13.4% (71 million) were extremely poor.”<sup>4</sup>

Most governments and researchers have acknowledged this reality as well as the need for urgent change. A key question is **why** it has not been possible construct, and implement, operational pro-poor policies based on all the existing knowledge about the theme? This is, certainly, not only a question of effectiveness, or policy oriented research, but also an invitation to a reflection on the importance of critical social/political thoughts and the role of academic knowledge in politics and political decision making and in leading to needed changes in power structures. Hence, we also expect to call ‘special’ attention to the various ethical and political aspects at play with respect to the (existing?) links between knowledge and pro-poor policies.

The objective is that these responses and reflections will be explored and discussed in detail with the students and junior researchers participating in the Bergen Summer Research School.

### **Program/panelists:**

*Business and social equity in Latin America*, **Benedicte Bull**, Associate Professor, Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), Norway

*Getting closer to the nexus between (poverty) research and policy: moving from the ivory tower to the crystal house*, **Alberto D. Cimadamore**, Professor, School of Social Sciences, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)/ CLACSO-CROP, Argentina

*Inspiring Policy, Creating Poverty: Academia and the Vagaries of Poverty Reduction in Latin America*, **John-Andrew McNeish**, Senior Researcher, Chr.Michelsens Institute (CMI), Norway

*Human Rights from Below: Contemporary social movements and emerging strategies against poverty and inequality in the Americas*, **Camilo Pérez Bustillo**, Research Professor, Human Rights Program, Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM), México

*Poverty and Inequality in Latin America: setbacks and recurrences*, **Laura Tavares Soares**, Professor, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and Researcher, Laboratorio de Políticas Públicas (Public Policies Laboratory), Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro (LPP/UERJ), Brasil

Q&A session/panel debate

**Chair:** Hans Egil Offerdal, Coordinator CROP/CLACSO-CROP

As a part of the event, the panelists will provide office-hours where interested registered (at the Bergen Summer Research School) students can meet individually with the researchers to discuss the theme or other poverty related issues in Latin America. The office of CROP is coordinating this effort.

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<sup>4</sup> CEPAL. Social Panorama of Latin America. Santiago, Chile: United Nations, 2007: 5.  
<[http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/9/30309/PSI2007\\_Sintesis\\_Lanzamiento.pdf](http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/9/30309/PSI2007_Sintesis_Lanzamiento.pdf)> The task in this particular setting is not to discuss methods of measurement, but rather policies to amend the situation.