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Incorporating a Cultural Perspective in Poverty Reduction

by

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Incorporating a Cultural Perspective in Poverty Reduction

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Abstract

The field of development has, to date, exhibited a purposeful disregard of the unique customs and practices of the communities participating in poverty reduction. Fortunately, though, there is a growing appreciation that culture and development are interdependent processes. This research undertook an exploration of the locally specific conceptualization of poverty and the poverty reduction aspirations of a community of Maasai in Kenya. Participants included Maasai individuals engaged in an intervention - namely, a school – with Good Water, a grassroots NGO, as well as representatives of that organization and unaffiliated Maasai. The findings of this research have affirmed the importance of incorporating a cultural perspective into development. I have concluded that, in order to achieve this, intensive participation of community members is essential throughout an intervention. Community members must have the opportunity to articulate their own conceptualization of poverty and from there formulate a desirable path to achieving their unique aspirations.

Keywords: Maasai, Marginalization, Development and Culture, Poverty Reduction

1.1 Culture and Development

Fundamental to the discourse of development following World War II were the writings of Rostow who, as described by Willis (2005, p. 39), viewed development “as a process...defined in relation to modernity, and to a move from agricultural societies with ‘traditional’ cultural practices, to a rational, industrial and service focused economy”. Rostow’s model, termed ‘modernization theory’, found its way into the philosophical approach to welfare enhancement of institutions such as the United Nations (UN) (Sachs 2010). Stiglitz (2002) argues that single-minded faith in the potential of this model to lift the world’s populations out of poverty has actually increased inequality, dismantled livelihood systems, contributed to a sense of powerlessness and eroded cultural heritage.

While Rao and Walton (2004, p. 3-4) have observed that “much of the discussion on the role of culture in development has either seen it as a primordial trap, a mystical haze, or a source of hegemonic power”, they assert that “a focus on culture is necessary to confront the difficult question of *what* is valued in terms of well-being, *who* does the valuing, and *why* economic and social factors interact with culture to unequally allocate access to a good life”.

1.2 Concepts: Poverty

Chambers (2006, p. 3) critiques contemporary conceptualizations of poverty as constructs of “our power, as non-poor people, to make definitions according to our perceptions”. He argues that the question of poverty needs to be reframed in order to reflect the experience of ‘illbeing’ and aspirations of the poor and marginalized. Poverty is a relative, contextual and constructed concept. Although the mutability of poverty, respective to the circumstances under consideration, may seem to create “serious cognitive problems” (ibid), Rahnema (2010) offers four identifiable dimensions that are likely to comprise any conceptualization of poverty. These include materialities (including both the material and existential ‘necessaries’ required for economic or biological survival); the subject’s own perception of his [sic] condition; how others view the poor; and social-cultural space-times (abbreviated as ‘spimes’) affecting various perceptions of poverty (Rahnema 2010, p. 176-7). These dimensions are, according to

Rahnema, interactive components in the construction of a contextually specific conceptualization of poverty.

1.3 Concepts: Poverty Reduction

Maxwell (2003) argues that the “New Poverty Agenda”, the favoured road map of the international development community, can provide clarity of purpose and incentives for political will to reduce poverty. Also, he notes, it represents a progressive shift in the discourse on poverty to embrace a multi-dimensional understanding of and a participatory approach to addressing poverty (ibid). Several authors, however, have criticized the New Poverty Agenda. Barder (2009) notes that there are at least three trade-off scenarios which characterize poverty reduction strategies. He identifies trade-offs between poverty reduction that is broad “reducing poverty for as many people as possible” and poverty reduction that is deep “focusing on...people in chronic, long-lasting and deep poverty”, between reducing poverty today and poverty in the future, and between sustainable programs that require continued funding and those that are temporary, “intended to catalyze economic growth or social and political transformation so that long term funding is not required” (Barder 2009, p. 1). Barder charges the international community of failing to recognize these trade-offs. Also, the persistence of a narrow focus on increasing economic growth as a mechanism to decrease the poverty headcount would seem to contradict the stated appreciation of the multi-dimensionality of poverty reduction.

Alkire (2004) lodges four criticisms against international development institutions related to their failure to consider culture. The first is “inefficient or failed projects...because staff did not accurately understand cultural influences and made inaccurate assumptions about behaviors or values” (Alkire 2004, p. 187). Second, is the neglected potential of resources such as culturally specific industries, skills or knowledge. The third criticism concerns values. Alkire (2004, p. 188) writes that “even when many agree that certain traditional practices are oppressive, the [development institution] staff’s unilateral authority to judge and impose measures to change those practices is disputed”. Fourth is the unforeseen negative impact of a poverty reduction intervention on culture. These four criticisms underscore the practical necessity of integrating a cultural perspective into poverty reduction strategies.

1.4 Concepts: Culture

According to Hall (1997), culture refers to the shared meanings of a community of individuals. It is a tool by which those persons collectively “make sense of things” and it stands as a “repository of values and meanings” (Hall 1997, p. 1). Culture is inherently dynamic (Hall 1997, Verhelst 1992, Douglas 2004, Sen 2004). It is the ever changing product of an ongoing competition within a community to assert one’s particular idea or representation (Wright 1998, Sen 2004). This right is a function of the distribution of power among community members (Said 1978). It is important to acknowledge, also, that culture is heterogeneous. Hall (1990, p. 225) argues that “we cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute... ‘uniqueness’”. Said (2003, p. xxii) cautions against the impulse to “herd people under falsely unifying rubrics...and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse”.

Until recently, culture was a topic of limited concern to economists confronted with poverty reduction (Sen 2004). However, Kuran (2004, p. 16) notes that “the traits that define a culture serve aesthetic, psychological, and social needs. They also influence economic performance”. And conversely, poverty reduction interventions are not confined to material impacts, but also influence sociocultural relationships (Alkire 2004). It is from this perspective that Sen has called for a more profound evaluation of the cultural dimension of poverty reduction, noting the role of value formation in identifying economic “ends” and “acceptable instruments to achieve those ends” (Sen 2004, p. 42).

1.5 Theoretical Debate: Marginalization

When the positioning of an individual or community functions as a constraint upon her/his capacity for self-determination, that condition can be referred to as marginalization (Hesse and Odhiambo 2002). The term ‘marginalized’ is potentially problematic, not least of all because it can be difficult to identify a discreet, homogenous community of individuals for whom the term fits. According to Kanbur (2007) there are four important characteristics of marginalization. He posits that marginalization is relational and continuous as well as being both an outcome and a process. Marginalization is relational in the sense that it implies the existence of some ‘other’. This means that if there is ‘the marginalized’, there must also be ‘the rest of society’ or ‘the rest of the economy’ or, alternatively, ‘the average’ (ibid). Marginalization is, therefore, comparative and oppositional. It is continuous in that, depending upon

the level under consideration, a community can be both marginalized as well as contain marginalized sectors.

The ‘outcome’ characteristic of marginalization addresses relationships of inequality (Kanbur 2007). Inequality can be expressed both as static; which refers to the level of inequality and dynamic; which refers to relative changes in inequality. Finally, the ‘process’ characteristic of marginalization concerns the degree of integration. In economic terms, “to the extent that the markets that some individuals or groups engage in are segmented from the economy in general, these individuals can be said to be marginalized from the rest of the economy” (Kanbur 2007, p. 2).

Kanbur (2007) goes on to say that the concept of marginalization is often misapplied to refer to ‘informal’ organization, where informal is described as ‘chaotic’ or ‘disordered’. He cautions that “this is a dangerous mindset which is empirically false and has led to policy disasters” (Kanbur 2007, p. 2).

I would argue that integrating a cultural perspective into planning for poverty reduction may serve to overcome the most pernicious effects of marginalization. Appadurai (2004, p. 59) writes that “in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity...the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty”.

2. Research Undertaken

The primary research undertaken for this paper was conducted during July and August of 2010 within Maasailand in Kenya. I used an instrumental case which, according to Stake (1998, p. 88) is useful to “provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory”. The poverty reduction intervention used as the case was a project of Good Water¹, a Kenyan NGO founded in 1984 to address the root causes of poverty through education, economic opportunity, community development and mental and physical health. Participants included members of the Maasai community as well as students, teachers and Good

¹ Good Water is an independently incorporated, non-denominational, Kenyan, socio-economic development service organization, managed by Kenyans with private donors and supporters within Kenya and throughout the world. The project used in this research is one of multiple interventions run by the organization across the greater Nairobi metro area. The staff and students of the school in Maasailand are not exclusively Maasai, but rather represent the tribal diversity of Kenya.

Water representatives. I developed this research according to the critical theory paradigm of qualitative research. Kane and O'Reilly-de Brun (2001, p. 35) explain that critical theory research involves interaction between the participants and the researcher whereby "the researcher's intent is not simply to collect information and work with the people to get an understanding of their current situation; it is to encourage the group to go further and plan action for change". I used a combination of non-probability sampling techniques, including purposeful, snowball and convenience sampling. My data collection was conducted through 13 interviews, 6 focus group discussions, 5 home visits and participant observation. According to Fielding (1993, p. 136), during a semi-standardized interview, the researcher "asks certain, major questions the same way each time, but is free to alter their sequence and to probe for more information". I found this approach useful with teachers, as this method highlighted both common threads as well as the diversity of experience and opinion among them. Alternatively, Fielding (1993, p. 136-7) emphasizes the "conversational" nature of non-standardized interviews and I found this method valuable when interacting with community members as I believe it afforded participants greater control of and initiative in the research process. Also, in this setting I felt more flexible and responsive to the participants' contributions. I incorporated one narrative interview which was not only valuable as a personal illustration of the practices described by many participants, but also crucial to my appreciation of the cultural context. Flick (2002) argues that focus groups represent a more authentic setting for the formulation of ideas and perspectives as participants exchange, challenge and reinforce individual contributions. I held 6 focus groups in total, each lasting 1-1.5 hours; 1 with adult community members, and 5 with students. Observation was also a useful data collection tool. I visited 5 *bomas* (homesteads) in the Maasai village. Additionally, I was invited to watch a football match in which the community team was preparing for a regional tournament. These visits allowed me the opportunity to engage with community members outside of the environment of Good Water.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1 Culture and Poverty

As noted above, Rao and Walton (2004) highlight the importance of understanding the locally specific conceptualization of poverty in order to identify "*what* is valued...*who* does the valuing, and *why* economic and social factors interact with culture to unequally allocate access to a good life". I have

applied Rahnema's (2010) four dimensions of poverty to participants' responses to address these questions.

The Maasai identified cattle, land and children as the materialities essential to economic and biological survival. Ultimately, livestock seems to provide the cornerstone to well-being for the Maasai. Land is a vital materiality for the maintenance of livestock. Even children, particularly girls, were identified as economic resources as they could be "sold" to increase the livestock holding of the family. It is indicative of cultural change, however, that younger participants noted such materialities as cars and televisions. Also, the evolving attitude towards large families, principally, that more children incur greater financial demand, shows an ongoing reconfiguration of the conceptualization of poverty by the Maasai.

With respect to the perception of the Maasai of their own condition, one thing that stands out is their vulnerability to shocks. Participants explained that the dependency on livestock establishes a de facto dependency on rainfall. When there is insufficient rainfall, their primary source of income and sustenance can be devastated. Issues of land ownership contribute to this vulnerability by negating the traditional adaptation mechanism of the Maasai, namely nomadicism. Additionally, participants described the negative impact on their social and psychological well-being resulting from the underrepresentation of the Maasai in political positions or formal sector employment. This can lead to feelings of inferiority, stress and extreme depression.

Non-Maasai participants similarly described vulnerability to shocks as a characteristic of poverty among the Maasai. Lacking alternative livelihood strategies, Maasai men and women are on occasion forced into informal economic activities such as the sex industry and begging. The negative connotations of these activities can exacerbate unhelpful stereotypes about the Maasai in Kenya's larger population.

The Spimes framework (Rahmena 2010, p. 176-7) provides an interesting view on the perception of poverty by and of the Maasai. It is significant that several community members indicated that Maasai from "the interior" would likely provide a different set of responses to my data collection questions. That the Maasai participating in this research are in such close proximity to the city of Nairobi has clearly influenced their world view. The repeated aspiration to be "enlightened" indicates that the Maasai believe themselves to be un-enlightened. Descriptions of Maasai practices as un-modern were reoccurring among both non-Maasai and community members themselves. The increasing tribal

diversity around Maasailand is unquestionably intensifying the intra-cultural struggle for meaning as Maasai are exposed to comparison with alternative systems and both internal and external scrutiny. For example, as the neo-liberal capitalist model seems to have gained ascendancy over alternative economic structures, formal education has become an important status symbol. The Maasai have not been immune to this trend.

Furthermore, the Kenyan legal system has both directly and indirectly condemned some elements of Maasai culture. The privatization of land is a key component to the neo-liberal capitalist model and considered indispensable to economic well-being (Hardin 1968)². In failing to make allowances for alternatives, such as by establishing ‘cattle corridors’, the government of Kenya (GOK) has effectively dismissed nomadic pastoralism as economically unviable and imposed insurmountable constraints on the Maasai livelihood system. In practice, this has exacerbated poverty among the Maasai and undermined their status within the extended community. Additionally, by an outright ban on female circumcision, the GOK has potentially further alienated the Maasai community and reinforced perceptions of their “backwardness”. It is worth noting that, although there is a strong contest surrounding the rite of female circumcision within Maasai culture the community has felt threatened by the government’s censure of the practice.

3.2 Culture and Poverty Reduction Aspirations

3.2.1 Poverty Reduction Aspirations

Based upon the participants’ responses, I have identified three core poverty reduction aspirations and one overarching theme.

Firstly, in my assessment, comments from participants expressing the aspiration to be “enlightened” originate from the relative socio-economic and political positioning of the Maasai. As suggested by one teacher, the vulnerability of the Maasai to livelihood shocks may have created a crisis of confidence within the community, particularly as they have observed other tribes’ seeming insulation from such

² “The Tragedy of the Commons” has since been disputed and ultimately rejected even by Hardin himself. However, Esteva (2014, p. 155) argues that the underlining assumptions – principally that ‘the commons’ are resources, and therefore economic commodities subject to scarcity – are erroneous and what is needed is a radical rejection of the neo-liberal model in exchange for an understanding of “social commons [as] social relationships”.

volatilities. “Enlightenment”, so to speak, would provide them with the skills necessary to achieve a similar socio-economic stability.

Additionally, the impact of government legislation, such as the prohibition of female circumcision and the right of the child to education, has certainly initiated a reflection by the Maasai on the continued relevance of some traditional practices. Unfortunately, insofar as the Maasai feel some cultural change is imposed, the end result may be further alienation and marginalization of the community. Further evidence of feelings of inferior positioning among the Maasai is found in the dreams of participants to see Maasai, particularly women, in skilled employment. The Maasai cited social and psychological consequences to being underrepresented in fields such as law, medicine and politics. This experience has, I suggest, inspired the Maasai to seek a more favorable socio-economic and political positioning relative to other tribes through education.

Secondly, participants indicated an aspiration to shift away from nomadic pastoralism as their fundamental livelihood strategy. I assert that there are two sources of this aspiration. Firstly, pastoralism is characterized by instability, both of the social and natural environments (Babiker 2006). Ideally, formal sector employment would provide a stable income and be less disruptive to the household than nomadic pastoralism. A secondary source of this aspiration may be the increasing privatization of Maasai lands. As several participants noted, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Maasai to move their cattle without violating property rights. This would seem to affirm the argument made by Rahnema (2010, p. 186) that the modern economy “often destroys a whole range of other human activities, which...continue to be vital for meeting their needs”.

Thirdly, the Maasai noted an aspiration to develop the physical infrastructure of the area, including paved roads, electricity and security as well as more schools and clinics. This form of development is essential to confronting the economic and political marginalization of the Maasai.

I argue the overarching theme of “choice” serves a dual function in the poverty reduction aspirations of the Maasai. Firstly, through education, individuals are expected to acquire a diverse set of skills which will increase their employment potential. This is constructive to decreasing the dependency of the Maasai on their livestock. In this way, “choice” can be understood as economic diversification. Secondly, participants exhibited a desire to see an expansion of the social possibilities available to young Maasai. This aspiration is captured, for example, in their preference to allow children to choose a spouse or a career based upon their personal inclination.

3.2.2 Trade-offs

As elaborated by Alkire (2004), the Maasai recognized that their poverty reduction aspirations required some cultural trade-offs. Participants identified nomadic pastoralism, the deterioration of traditional leadership and the decline of early marriage as chief concessions. They argued that nomadicism and early marriage practices were incompatible with education and, as such, their dreams for the future. The idea that traditional selection of leaders is inconsistent with poverty reduction is tied to the preeminence of formal qualifications as a requirement for government positions. Participants acknowledged that the lack of such prerequisites undermines their capacity to assert themselves in the political arena. It is interesting, however, that — almost without exception — the Maasai were expected to bear the burden of adaptation. I submit that this displays an unfortunate lack of creativity on the part of policy makers which will almost certainly unduly compromise the empowerment of the Maasai.

Affirming Babiker's (2006) dismissal of "crisis narratives" which herald the demise of pastoralist societies based upon short-term observations, Maasai participants enthusiastically announced that they would continue to transmit their cultural values in the *boma* while integrating the positive attributes of other communities. Notwithstanding this acceptance of the process of cultural change, there was significant emotion surrounding Maasai values of respect and the rite of circumcision. The value of respect seems to be intricately linked with social order and communal harmony. It is easily understood, therefore, that respect is crucial to the achievement of their poverty reduction aspirations. The rite of circumcision was the most contested point of my research. Both for the community as a whole as well as for some individuals, female circumcision in particular represented a major source of confusion and dispute. Some expressed resignation at the fact that, having been banned by the GOK, the practice would be abandoned. Others who argued the physical risks associated with it, including intense pain and possible HIV infection, would simultaneously articulate the social benefits of the rite. It seems clear that the rite of circumcision, for boys and girls alike, serves as a key moment in the distribution of power. Several participants explained that one who failed to undergo the procedure or who showed fear or pain during it "could not speak" before others of the same sex. Additionally, the rite of circumcision is pivotal to an individual's sense of belonging. Consequently, insofar as such recognition is necessary to one's overall well-being, circumcision is an important cultural rite.

3.3 A Cultural Perspective to Poverty Reduction

3.3.1 Incorporating Culture at Good Water

Kuran (2004) observes that, as the discourse is conducted by the privileged, there is a risk that poverty reduction strategies may fail to respond to the locally specific conceptualization of poverty. However, organizations such as Good Water are in a position to engage communities in a genuine exploration of their understanding of poverty and then collaboratively design a contextually specific poverty reduction strategy. To apply Sen (2004, p. 42), Good Water can take the poverty reduction aspirations stated previously, or economic “ends”, and, through a deep appreciation for Maasai cultural values, identify “acceptable instruments to achieve those ends”. Poverty reduction which is so informed is more likely to contribute to the “expansion of substantive freedoms” as the participants might imagine them (Sen 1999). Incorporating a cultural perspective into the school in Maasailand is also important to forestall any unnecessary detriment to Maasai culture. Kuran (2004) warns against the imposition of unacceptable cultural trade-offs and calls for restraint on the part of development practitioners where such is at risk. By undertaking to understand the intricacies of Maasai culture and values, Good Water can facilitate poverty reduction which fortifies cultural diversity.

Reinforcing cultural values may also mean making accommodations for the continued role of cattle in Maasai culture. Good Water has undertaken one such accommodation by allowing the community to access water from the bore hole at the cost of drawing it. Nonetheless, more creative thinking may be necessary as more challenges, such as increased privatization of land, arise. Also, integrating Maasai culture into the school can facilitate creative problem solving. The pride of the Maasai, so often referred to by community members and non-Maasai alike, would seem to be such a resource for poverty reduction. Remembering the detrimental social and psychological effects of poverty described by participants, this cultural attribute would seem of immense value. As such, the practice of Good Water of holding dances, songs and story-tellings with the Maasai is an important mechanism for incorporating a cultural perspective into the school.

The effective incorporation of a cultural perspective into poverty reduction requires intensive participation of the Maasai in the planning and evaluation stages of the intervention. Workshops, seminars, and community meetings are important ways for the Maasai to exert their vision of poverty reduction. However, some community members expressed questions over the purpose of Good Water.

This indicates that there remains room to devolve planning and decision making power to the Maasai. Nonetheless, it remains necessary that Good Water continue its engagement in order to serve as a resource for marginalized voices within the community.

3.3.2 Confronting Marginalization

Through adopting a culturally informed strategy in Maasailand, Good Water is in a position to uncover the experience of marginalization by the Maasai. As was observed by several participants, the Maasai are underrepresented in the civil and political spheres and overturning this condition was specified as a poverty reduction aspiration. With this in mind, Good Water can facilitate participation in democratic processes by providing access to relevant information. Also, Good Water has an important role to play in breaking down stereotypes about the Maasai. The cultural exchange that was described by participants is crucial in this respect. Most significant, however, is that Good Water continues to dialogue with the Maasai in order to remain abreast of their evolving poverty reduction aspirations. These objectives are directly linked to the empowerment of the Maasai. According to Appadurai (2004, p. 59), “in strengthening the capacity to aspire” the Maasai can find within themselves the resources to deconstruct their marginalization.

Good Water also has a role to play in confronting marginalization within the Maasai community. Participants explained that cultural change is a legitimate objective of the organization. In particular, women have accessed the school as a resource to escape or to hide their daughters from early marriages. This is evidence of the opportunity that Good Water has to enable the expression of suppressed voices within the community. Whereas there is such a strong contest surrounding the rite of female circumcision, the organization must tread the fine line of remaining receptive to those who would challenge the practice while not seeming to impose external values on the community. It should be observed that, as the Maasai felt threatened by the government ban on the rite, female circumcision has “gone underground”. This reaction is disconcerting as surreptitious acts tend to be characterized by greater risk to the physical and emotional well-being of the concerned parties.

4. A Cultural Perspective: Why and How?

In addition to the four potential consequences of the failure to incorporate culture into a poverty reduction strategy discussed above, the opportunity to exercise one's culture is increasingly appreciated as an essential component to an individual's well-being. For example, the Maasai explained that their culture provides them with a sense of belonging, social cohesion, pride and self-worth. Both community members and representatives of Good Water alike remarked that, had the organization not demonstrated an appreciation for their culture, the Maasai would not have been willing to enroll their children in the school.

There are mechanisms in place at Good Water, such as regular cultural performances and incorporating culture into the curriculum, which are important to prevent cultural erosion. However, I would suggest that Good Water has made an inadequate effort to identify creative solutions or resources for poverty reduction from within the community. In this respect, the organization and the community have an opportunity to grow together. Furthermore, the rite of female circumcision surfaces as a point of significant tension both among the Maasai and between them and the extended community. For the continued success of the poverty reduction strategy, it is vital that Good Water manages to balance its role as an accepted change agent with its positioning as an external entity. This requires that the organization maintains, as it does, complete transparency regarding its commitment to reinforce international and national laws concerning the rights of the child. Good Water should offset this position with a deep dialogue with community members. My research has also revealed that there remains a gap between the expression of and response to community members' voices. The Maasai who participated in this study clearly demonstrated that they are actively engaged in the construction of their culture. In my opinion, Good Water has thus far been a positive partner in this. Through the existing Committee and Resource Person, the organization is equipped to understand and address the community's aspirations. Nonetheless, there remains room for the further devolution of decision-making power to the community itself. I would suggest that this can contribute to creative problem solving on the issues confronting the Maasai community.

5. Conclusions

Despite a history of neglect, the development community is beginning to acknowledge the ways in which culture affects poverty reduction including the conceptualization of poverty and the construction of a community's poverty reduction aspirations. For the Maasai, the conceptualization of poverty is grounded in their self-identification as pastoralists. Cattle, as a central element not only in biological survival but also in their myth and ceremony, have defined their access to 'the good life'. However, for the Maasai involved in this research, the dependency on cattle had become a contributing factor to poverty. As such, their poverty reduction aspirations include the desire to diversify their economic opportunities. This, however, does not mean a wholesale abandonment of pastoralism, but a calculated expansion of their choices.

I have elaborated here four potential consequences of the failure to incorporate culture into a poverty reduction strategy, including risk for project failure, oversight of creative solutions or resources, cultural erosion and the imposition of external values. The practical incorporation of a cultural perspective into planning for poverty reduction can only be achieved through intensive participation. Participants alone are capable of developing appropriate poverty reduction aspirations and identifying the trade-offs. That entails firstly, a conceptualization of poverty reduction constructed according to the community's world view. Secondly, decision-making power must rest with the community members. In so doing, incorporating a cultural perspective to poverty reduction has the potential to deconstruct systems of marginalization and create a positive, sustainable transformation of a community's experience of poverty.

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