

The Plight of the Poor

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Very few people can afford to be poor.

— George Bernard Shaw

For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

— Deuteronomy 15:11

No hovel is so wretched but it will find a worker to rent it because he is too poor to pay for better accommodation.

— Engels

Course: Special Topics in International Development: The Plight of the Poor

Course Number: IDC518
Lecture: Mondays 2:00–4:45pm
Location: 218 International Studies Hall

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1 Introduction

Imagine that each member of your family had only 800 won (=1 USD at PPP) to spend each day on shelter, food, clothing, and other expenses. For one in every six people on our planet this is their daily reality. This course seeks first and foremost to elucidate the lives of the world's poorest people, examining their strategies for surviving another day, another week. To help these individuals improve their lives, however, requires that we situate them in their broader political economic context. Being poor is not simply about having enough money. We will explore alternative approaches to conceiving of and measuring poverty. We will then investigate some of the different policies implied by each of these approaches.

2 Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be knowledgeable on:

1. Diverse measurements and definitional debates of poverty and the rationales behind such measures and debates.
2. The conditions with which the poorest of humanity must cope everyday and the strategies they employ to do so.
3. Different responses to poverty and attempts at poverty alleviation from different actor groups, including governments, the poor themselves, international institutions, and private sector non-profits.
4. The basic structure of academic papers, thesis questions, and literature reviews.

3 Course Requirements

- Great consideration has been given to what readings are assigned. As such, you are expected to have completed all the readings assigned prior to our class meetings. Do not expect that you can complete the readings assigned in one night simply because there are only two chapters or a few articles to read. The readings can be dense and take time to get through. Some class time will also be dedicated to discussions of current news, group activities, and multi-media presentations.
- A one-page Reaction Paper (RP) is due electronically by 9am MONDAY morning each week for 10 out of the 12 weeks for which there are readings. This allows you to choose which weeks to write a reflection paper. The papers will not be graded with a letter grade, but will be allocated from zero to four points depending on how actively your paper engages the material. The paper should usually be 350–500 words (about one page single-spaced). These brief papers are intended to facilitate class discussion in seminar. You can use the Reaction Paper (RP) to ask for clarification about any aspect of the readings you did not fully understand and/or to express an opinion about one or more of the readings. In general, I would advise you to focus the RP on only one of the readings assigned for each week. RPs should be clearly written, spell-checked, stylistically polished, and grammatically correct.

- In addition to writing your own RP, you are expected to read and reflect on those of all other seminar participants prior to our class meeting. This will enable you to think about your classmates' reactions to the readings in advance of our collective discussion.
- Class attendance is not mandatory, but each unexcused absence will deduct two points from your final grade. Beyond this, class participation is strongly encouraged. I would grade on the basis of participation, but I do not wish to penalize students who are naturally reticent. However, you should expect to have your opinions solicited if you do not offer them freely... and nobody enjoys that.
- An group research paper will be required. This paper will be modeled on a master's thesis question and literature review. Your group of three is free to choose any topic related to the course material. However, you must consult with me to get your topic approved. The paper must be 3,000–4,000 words long (not including cover pages and bibliographies). Note that the paper is due at the beginning of class on December 6. Late papers will lose ten points (one letter grade) per day. See the section on the paper for full details.
- You will be individually responsible for editing another team's draft paper in a double-blind peer review process. This exercise provides an opportunity to apply your analytical and writing skills to another topic, thereby strengthening those skills in both yourself and your colleagues. See the section on the paper for full details.
- There will no examinations.

4 Grading

Weights

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| 50% | Group paper |
| 40% | Response papers |
| 10% | Editing |

5 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable. If plagiarism is detected, you will receive an F for the course. There will be no exceptions. Please note that plagiarism is much broader than many students realize. You are encouraged to look at this excellent summary of plagiarism from Indiana University (<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>), and you will be held to its standards.

6 Required texts

All materials will be available electronically and as a reader. However, significant portions of the following affordable books will be used, and you should thus consider purchasing your own copy.

- Paul Collier. *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2007.
- Jeffrey D. Sachs. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. Penguin Books, New York, 2005.

7 Schedule of Topics and Reading

All the readings below will be available electronically and a reader. In addition, further readings may be assigned to compliment and integrate current events into the course discussions.

Note: You should be sure to bring a copy (electronic or hard) to class for those articles marked with a †.

Module 1: What does it mean to be poor?

Week 1 (Aug. 27): Introduction

Week 2 (Sept. 3): Measuring and creating poverty

1. John Iceland. *Poverty in America: A Handbook*. University of California Press, second edition, 2006, chapters 2 and 3.

2. †Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion. How have the world's poorest fared since the early 1980s? *The World Bank Research Observer*, 19(2):141–169, 2004.
3. Anonymous. More or less equal?, 11 March 2004.
4. Martin Ravallion. Pessimistic on poverty? *The Economist*, 7 April 2004.
5. Angus Deaton. Is world poverty falling? *Finance and Development*, 39(2):4–7, June 2002.

Week 3 (Sept. 10): Locating poverty

1. Jeffrey D. Sachs. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. Penguin Books, New York, 2005, chapter 1.
2. Pietro Garau, Elliott D. Sclar, and Gabriella Carolini. *A home in the city*. Earthscan, Sterling, 2005, chapter 1.

Week 4 (Sept. 17): Shelter poverty and the working poor

Paper topic due.

1. Michael Stone. *Shelter Poverty: New Ideas on Housing Affordability*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993, chapters 1 and pages 32–36 of chapter 2.
2. David K. Shipler. *The Working Poor*. Vintage Books, New York, 2005, introduction and chapter 2.

Week 5 (Sept. 24): Freedom and capabilities

1. Amartya Sen. *Development as Freedom*. Anchor Books, New York, 1999, chapters 1 and 3.
2. Martha Craven Nussbaum. *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Belknap Press, Cambridge, 2011, chapters 2 and 4.

Module 2: Why are there poor people?

Week 6 (Oct. 1): Traps: Conflict and natural resources

1. Paul Collier. *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, chapters 2 and 3.
2. †Macartan Humphreys. Natural resources, conflict, and conflict resolution: Uncovering the mechanisms. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49(4):508–537, 2005.

Week 7 (Oct. 8): Traps: Landlocked and bad governance

1. Paul Collier. *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, chapters 4 and 5.
2. †Nuno Lim ao and Anthony J. Venables. Infrastructure, geographical disadvantage, transport costs, and trade. *The World Bank Economic Review*, 15(3):451–479, 2001.

Week 8 (Oct. 15): Midterm exams. No class. Meet me to talk about paper.

Module 3: Responses

Week 9 (Oct. 22): Trade and globalization

1. Jeffrey D. Sachs. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. Penguin Books, New York, 2005, chapter 2.
2. Nancy Birdsall. Inequality matters: Why globalization doesn't lift all boats. *Boston Review*, March/April 2007.
3. Andre Gunder Frank. The development of underdevelopment. *Monthly Review*, 18(4):17–31, September 1966.
4. G. Pascal Zachary. Out of Africa: Cotton and cash. *The New York Times*, 14 January 2007.

Week 10 (Oct. 29): Aid and Trade. Watch *Life and Debt*.

1. F. Odun Balogun. *Adjusted Lives: Stories of Structural Adjustments*. Africa World Press, Inc., Trenton, 1995, chapters 7, 8, and 9.

Week 11 (Nov. 5): Aid

1. Jeffrey D. Sachs. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. Penguin Books, New York, 2005, chapters 12 and 13.
2. Paul Collier. *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, chapter 7.
3. William Easterley. *The Elusive Quest for Growth: Economists' Adventures and Misadventures in the Tropics*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, chapter 2.

Week 12 (Nov. 12): Education

Draft of group paper due in class.

1. Paulo Friere. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum, New York, 30th anniversary edition, 1973, chapters 1 and 2.
2. †Laura B. Rawlings and Gloria M. Rubio. Evaluating the impact of conditional cash transfer programs. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 20(1):29–55, 2005.

Week 13 (Nov. 19): Social movements

1. Mao Zedong. Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in hunan. http://marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm, March 1927. Available through marxists.org.
2. Mao Zedong. On practice: On the relation between knowledge and practice, between knowing and doing. http://marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm, July 1937. Available through marxists.org.

Week 14 (Nov. 26): Institutions—Property rights, governance, and corruption

Edits to be returned.

1. Hernando de Soto. *The Other Path: The Economic Answer to Terrorism*. Basic Books, New York, 1989, chapter 2.
2. William Easterley. *The Elusive Quest for Growth: Economists' Adventures and Misadventures in the Tropics*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, chapter 12.
3. Paul Collier. *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poor Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, chapter 9.

Recommended:

1. Douglass Cecil North. *Structure and change in economic history*. Norton, New York, 1st edition, 1981, pages 3–58.
2. Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson. Unbundling institutions. *Journal of Political Economy*, 113(5):949–995, 2005.

Week 15 (Dec. 3): Land grab and mining

1. Ward Anseeuw, Liz Alden Wily, Lorenzo Cotula, and Michael Taylor. *Land Rights and the Rush for Land: Findings on the Global Commercial Pressures on Land Research Project*. International Land Coalition, Rome, 2012.
2. †Walter Fernandes. Mines, mining and displacement in india. In Gurdeep Singh, David Laurence, and Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, editors, *Managing the Social and Environmental Consequences of Coal Mining in India*, pages 333–344. Dhanbad: The Indian School of Mines University, 2007.

Week 16 (Dec. 10): Exam period. No class.

8 Group paper

This paper is modeled on the early stages of writing an academic paper. In groups of three, you will identify a question you would like to answer. For example, you might ask, “Does corruption at low levels of government adversely affect development?” Having identified a concrete question and clearing it with me, you will assemble a literature review of scholarly articles that address your question of interest.

The literature review should cover at least ten *pertinent* articles per student.

Length: 3,000–4,000 words

8.1 Question: September 18

You should submit a preliminary question and an explanation of why that question is important at the beginning of class on September 18. The length should be roughly 250–300 words. Note that to come up with a good question, you will have to do some preliminary research to find out what concrete issues are being debated in the academic literature. Google Scholar and JSTOR, among others, are excellent resources for getting started. You may need to meet with me as a group to develop a proper question.

8.2 Consulting: Midterm period

During the midterm period, each group will meet with me to discuss your progress. By this point, you should have read a number of articles related to your question and have a preliminary idea of the various positions scholars hold with regard to your question. The purpose of this meeting is to clearly identify those schools of thought so that you can build a proper literature review.

8.3 Draft: November 13

A draft of your literature review is due on November 13. You must submit one copy for each member of your group. These will be redistributed to your colleagues for editing and comments.

8.3.1 Formatting

You should turn in a stapled, hard copy in class on May 9th. You should include a cover page with your name, title, and any other relevant information you choose to include. Your name should NOT appear anywhere else in the document. The first page of your text should, however, include the title. Also, use a common font. These precautions are being put in place to ensure privacy in editing.

8.4 Editing: November 20

You will receive an anonymous paper written by one of your colleagues in class on November 13. In class on the 20th, we will return them to their rightful owners. In the meantime, you are required to provide editorial and critical assistance to help your colleague improve his or her paper. To do so successfully, there are four primary requirements:

1. Write a summary of the paper that does not exceed 100 words.
2. Rewrite at least one paragraph of 150 words or more. In rewriting the paragraph, your aim should be to make the paragraph clearer and better organized. Though less important for your grade, you should also strive to improve the paragraph stylistically to make the prose more engaging, e.g., replacing passive with active verbs. (I recognize that this will not be easy if English is your second language, but you should try nonetheless.)
3. Throughout the text, you should identify sentences or ideas that are unclear and confusing.
4. Consider the overall organization of the paper’s argument. Does it follow a logical progression? Make suggestions for how the paper might more effectively make its argument.

8.5 Final draft: December 4

You will then have two weeks to work on the final draft of your paper. On December 4, you will hand in a hard copy of your paper and the original drafts with your colleague’s edits.