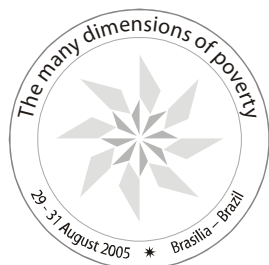


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## Towards An Unified Framework for Understanding the Depth, Breadth and Duration of Poverty

*Conference paper*

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**Towards An Unified Framework for Understanding the Depth, Breadth and Duration of Poverty**

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*Abstract/ Summary*

In recent decades there have been considerable steps forward in terms of understanding poverty. This paper identifies three ‘meta dimensions’ of poverty, which relate to: (1) depth and severity; (2) breadth and multidimensionality; and (3) time and duration. The advances that have been made in terms of conceptualising, measuring and analysing poverty in each of these areas are briefly considered. It is shown that the third and final ‘meta-dimension’ – time and duration – has been neglected until relatively recently. It is argued that time, and in particular, duration is an important analytical component for understanding the experience of poverty and the processes that create and reduce poverty. The final part of the paper suggests a way of integrating time into a unified framework for understanding poverty, which can deal with the depth, breadth and duration of poverty. This involves extending Qizilbash’s poverty and vagueness methodology to include duration.

Key words: poverty, time, multi-dimensionality, capability and vagueness.

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# Towards An Unified Framework for Understanding the Depth, Breadth and Duration of Poverty

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades there have been considerable steps forward in terms of both the conceptualisation and measurement of poverty. By drawing on the available literature this paper suggests it is possible to identify at least three ‘meta-dimensions’<sup>1</sup> of poverty, which are distinct from ordinary dimensions or components of poverty. The first recognises that poverty has *breadth* in the sense that it is multi-dimensional and composed of a range of different capability, rights or need deprivations – such as illiteracy, poor health and physical insecurity – which go well beyond the traditional focus on income, consumption and resources. The second recognises that poverty in a particular dimension – not necessarily income – has *depth* and may be far more serious in one case than another. The third meta-dimension relates to time, and in particular to the duration of poverty, which has been neglected in the literature until relatively recently.<sup>2</sup>

This paper has three main objectives. The first is to show that time in terms of duration is an important analytical component for understanding the experience of poverty and the processes that create and reduce poverty (and thus it is important for policy and action). The second is to consider the advances that have been made in conceptualising, measuring and analysing poverty in recent years – particularly in terms of breadth/ multidimensionality and depth/ severity. This confirms the advances made in these two meta dimensions and reveals the more limited progress in the third dimension, time. The third and final part of the paper explores one possible way of integrating time into a ‘unified’ framework for understanding poverty, which is able to deal with the breadth, depth and duration of poverty. This approach involves extending Qizilbash’s vagueness methodology to include duration.

This paper is organised as follows. Section 1 argues that time and in particular duration matter and considers some of the reasons why time has been neglected until relatively recently. Sections 3, 4 and 5 consider the advances that have been made in terms of conceptualising, measuring and analysing poverty in each of the meta dimensions. Section 6 investigates one possible way of incorporating time into a

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<sup>1</sup> By meta dimensions we are referring to overarching components of the concept of poverty. Within each meta dimension there may be several dimensions. For example, *breadth* might include nutrition, health, literacy, and physical security (amongst other dimensions). *Depth* may incorporate headcounts (the number or proportion of people below the poverty line), the poverty gap (how far on average the poor fall below the poverty line) and a measure of inequality among the poor, inter alia. Finally, *time* typically involves duration (i.e. linear time, which is the focus in this paper), but could be expanded to include rhythms and histories (see section 2). Alkire (2002) discusses the characteristics of dimensions as normally understood in the development literature.

<sup>2</sup> The case might be made that space (i.e. the geographical distribution of poverty) is a fourth meta-dimension. While the analysis of spatial patterns of poverty is important for understanding the processes that underpin poverty and for policy we do not think that the location of poverty needs to be part of the concept of poverty.

framework that can deal with the breadth, depth and duration of poverty. Section 7 provides a summary and some conclusions.

## 2. Time and Poverty

*'I know what time is if I am not asked' a wise old man once said, 'if I am asked, I no longer know'* (Elias, 1992, p.1; cited in Bevan, 2004, p.11).

The 'breakthroughs' in conceptualising the breadth/multidimensionality and depth/severity of poverty (see below) have not been matched by equivalent, systematic, theoretical advances with regard to time. While time has been incorporated into poverty analysis in a number of different ways (see below) it is only recently that researchers have begun to explore the alternative conceptualisations that are available.

It is possible to incorporate time into the conceptualisation of poverty at two fundamentally different levels. The first of these involves treating time as an ordinary dimension of poverty, rather like the second volume of the World Bank's study *Voices of the Poor* has done (see Narayan and Chambers et al 2000, esp. pp. 21, 34, 92-3). In this approach time or lack of it, is merely another dimension or component of poverty. A person is defined as time poor if he or she lacks the necessary time to achieve things of value, such as adequate sleep and rest or being with family and friends (see Clark, 2004, ch. 4). In this respect time is often viewed as a resource, although it undoubtedly has intrinsic significance as well. This paper is concerned with the other way of integrating time into the study of poverty. That is treating time as a meta-dimension of poverty itself rather than simply an additional dimension to the breadth of poverty.

Until the late 1980s the main ways in which time was included in poverty analysis was in terms of poverty trends, seasonality, the timing of experiences and historical accounts of poverty. Poverty trends commonly contrasted headcounts of poverty snapshots across a population at two different times. They provided a general impression of whether poverty in a country was increasing or decreasing between two points in time but little or no idea of the dynamic nature of poverty. Comparing poverty trends does not tell us whether households are persistently poor or if they typically move into and/or out of poverty over time (see Hulme, forthcoming; Hulme and Shepherd, 2003; Carter and Barrett, 2004, p.4). For example, in the case of Vietnam, Karen Moore (2005) – drawing on *The Chronic Poverty Report 2004/05* – observes that:

... during the 1990s, Vietnam experienced [a] significant reduction in poverty: from 1993 to 1998, rural and urban poverty rates fell by about 24% and 15% respectively. But these aggregate poverty trends tell us nothing about what happened to individual households. In rural areas one third of the population remained poor, and another 5% fell into poverty... The urban picture is nowhere near as severe – about 7% stayed in poverty while only 2% moved into poverty... Why did Vietnam's pro-poor growth fail to reach over half of the rural poor and over one-quarter of the urban poor? Looking at the data in more detail provides some indication.

Lawson, McKay and Okidi (2003) report in a similar vein on the case of Uganda. Between 1992 and 1999 poverty in Uganda fell by about 20 percent as the headcount

rate fell from 55.7 percent to 35.2 percent. However, moving beyond conventional poverty analysis by looking at the dynamics of poverty (i.e. what actually happened to individual households over time) provides a richer picture. Almost 30 percent of poor households in 1992 managed to move out of poverty by 1999, but around 10 percent of non-poor households fell into poverty. About 19 percent of households that were poor in 1992 remained poor in 1999 (Lawson, McKay and Okidi, 2003, p.7 and table 1).

The seasonality of income, consumption and access to food was another focus with particular interest in the annual cycles of relative plenty and food shortage/ hunger that occur in many rural areas (Chambers, Longhurst and Pacey, 1981). The significance of specific poverty experiences at certain times in the lifecourse was also highlighted with a particular focus on lack of access to food/ nutrition for pregnant women and children and education. A lack of access to nutrition, basic health services or education in early life (foetal and infant) can have irreversible effects on the physical stature and cognitive ability of people (Loury, 1981; Strauss and Thomas, 1998; Yaqub, 2002). Historical accounts of poverty – seeking to lay out and interpret the main experiences and events in a chronological order – also continued (Geremek, 1994; Haswell, 1975; Hufton, 1974), although Iliffe's (1987) work moved things forward through its contrast of structural and conjunctural poverty in Africa which went beyond the static poverty analyses of his era.

Since the late 1980s there has been growing interest in examining the duration of poverty. Economists initially led the way through studies of transitory and chronic poverty, poverty dynamics and patterns of poverty spells (see section 5). More recently economists have recognised the fact that mortality represents an under-reported aspect of poverty because premature death robs an individual of all the functionings they could have experienced over their 'lost' years (Kanbur and Mukherjee, 2003).<sup>3</sup> While these studies have helped to put duration on the research agenda, their narrow focus on income or consumption poverty means that they have, at best, only tangentially linked up with the conceptual advances promoted by Sen and others.

Clearly 'time' merits serious attention for the conceptualisation of poverty and there are a number of different ways in which this might be pursued. Much depends on the meaning attached to time.<sup>4</sup> Bevan (2004) highlights three contrasting approaches. Time might be construed in terms of (1) *clocks and calendars*, which measure linear time mechanically with reference to duration and intervals; (2) *rhythms*, which focus on the mechanisms and power structures built into people and things as they move through time and change; and (3) *histories*, which involve sequences of events and interactions between mechanisms and structures that lead to path dependence. Integrating any of these notions of time into the conceptualisation and analysis of

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<sup>3</sup> It is not possible to pursue this matter here. Hicks and Streeten (1979), Dasgupta and Weale (1992) and Sen (1998) present cases for viewing human poverty and deprivation in terms of 'life-expectancy' and mortality rates, amongst other indicators.

<sup>4</sup> Entire books have been written on the meaning of time (e.g. Elias, 1992; Abbott, 2001), although it is not possible to pursue this subject here.

poverty would undoubtedly be a useful exercise. In this paper we will focus on the linear conception of time, which is concerned with the duration of poverty<sup>5</sup>.

We believe that the ‘duration’ aspect of time merits particular attention for four main reasons. First, there is a simple logic that says if  $x$  has experienced the same forms and depths of poverty as  $y$ , but for a much longer period, then a moral concern with helping the worst off requires that  $x$  be prioritised and supported as s/he has experienced more deprivation than  $y$ .<sup>6,7</sup> Second, a failure to analyse the distribution of spells in poverty in a population is likely to lead to weak analyses of ‘why’ people are poor and, potentially, to weak policies. For example, hypothetically two different countries might have the same scores for the headcount, depth and severity of poverty. Apparently, poverty in both of these countries is similar. However, in the first country poverty is largely transitory and is a phenomenon that many of its population experience but only for short durations. In the other, most of the population are non-poor but a minority are trapped in poverty for most or all of their lives. In the former country policies need to help those experiencing short spells of poverty – unemployment insurance and benefits, reskilling, microcredit, temporary social safety nets, health services. In the latter, deeper structural problems must be addressed – inclusion of the poor in access to health and education services, asset redistribution, tackling social exclusion, regional infrastructural development. Thirdly, recent important work (Carter and Barrett, 2004; Barrett, forthcoming) has revealed the linkages between the depth of poverty, in terms of material and social assets, and duration with a focus on household level poverty traps. The assumption behind this work is that low levels of assets lead to persistent poverty (at least in the absence of financial markets and safety nets), but a conceptualisation is needed that will also permit an analysis of the ways in which the duration of poverty leads to depleted asset levels. Finally, the duration of time spent in poverty has important

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<sup>5</sup> Bevan (2004) considers ways of incorporating rhythms and histories into poverty analysis.

<sup>6</sup> In effect this is arguing that the breadths, depths and durations of the deprivations  $x$  and  $y$  experience should be multiplied and thus  $x$  will score a higher level of deprivation than  $y$ . If this computation were pursued it would be necessary to decide whether duration was computed as absolute time or relative time i.e. the proportion of  $x$  and  $y$ 's lives spent in poverty. The problem with such measures (and aggregate summary statistics generally) is that they conceal at least as much as they reveal about the nature of human poverty and deprivation (**Any refs to insert...?**)

<sup>7</sup> In this example  $x$  is not poorer than  $y$  as the form and depth of the deprivation in question are equivalent.  $X$ , however, has been poorer for longer than  $y$  (possibly for much longer than  $y$ ), and arguably this ought to count for something morally speaking. In this case we might accept that  $x$  is generally ‘worse off’ than  $y$ , although not necessarily poorer than  $y$ . In this example the lives of both  $x$  and  $y$  are blighted by their deprivation. If we formally classify  $x$  as poorer than  $y$ , we risk obscuring the deprivation of  $y$ , which may well be quite serious.

There may also be cases in which the form and depth of a deprivation has lasting consequences, even after the initial deprivation has passed. Such deprivation may demand greater weight relative to similar deprivations endured over a longer time horizon. It is possible, however, that the ‘lasting consequences’ in question might show up in other dimensions of poverty (e.g. mental trauma resulting from past physical abuse).



implications for individual or household future strategies. This is in terms of physical and cognitive capabilities (see above) and the ways in which past experience shapes the agency (motivation, preferences and understandings) of people.

In later sections of this paper we examine duration in more detail but before then it is worth looking at why duration has not featured more prominently in the conceptualisation, measurement and analysis of poverty. It is possible to identify at least five reasons. First, there are the general difficulties that social scientists, and particularly those using quantitative methods, have in making their analyses longitudinal. It is much easier to conduct static and/or cross country or spatial comparisons both conceptually and methodologically. Most notably the problem of sample attrition and matching makes it increasingly difficult to conduct meaningful analyses over time. An investigation of the Michigan Panel Study on Income Dynamics found that by 1989 the panel ‘had experienced approximately 50 percent sample loss from cumulative attrition from its initial 1968 membership’ (Fitzgerald et al., 1998). The same investigation found that attrition is ‘highly selective’ and tends to be concentrated among the most deprived and vulnerable groups (although the authors go on to claim that this did ‘not seriously distort the representativeness’ of the Michigan Panel).

Second, empirical studies that attempt to track processes and measures over time face practical problems that are not encountered in static analyses. In particular, they have to ‘wait’ until they can repeat their data collection exercise in the future. Depending on the nature and purpose of the study, this may entail a break of several years – as with most Living Standard Measurement Surveys or National Censuses – before any longitudinal analysis can be attempted. Repeat visits also greatly increase the cost of research, which place strict limits on the number of waves it is possible to administer in most panel surveys. (Many panel surveys are restricted to no more than two or three waves). In addition most funders want to see research projects completed in two or three years, which effectively leaves no time to ‘go back’. Respondents are also more likely to experience interview fatigue if they are repeatedly visited. The ‘shortcut’ alternative is to try to capture household dynamics by asking people to recall their past experiences. While this method has value there are challenges to it because of the increased probability of inaccuracies and the ‘rewriting’ of memories.

Third, there are ethical problems associated with revisiting people experiencing hardship without being part of some practical local initiative to provide assistance. Many research projects are specifically designed to address national or global policy issues, but draw on fieldwork conducted in specific localities. Even when these projects are reasonably successful, there is often no sign of tangible results at the grass roots level in the short or medium term. Moreover the link with any long term improvement in the quality of life and the original research may not be obvious. Relatively few research projects lead to highly visible local development initiatives such as the installation of electricity or piped water.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Most agencies prefer to fund research projects that produce results that can be generalised and used to inform development policy well beyond the boundaries of the original fieldwork sites. DFID, for example, only funds projects with relevance for more than one country.

Fourth, there are pressures on poverty researchers to conduct studies that can guide policy and action ‘here and now’. In particular, there is tremendous political and moral pressure to provide answers and solutions today, instead of waiting for the results of further rounds of interviews. Finally, there is the contextual problem that most poverty occurs in low-income countries where the difficulties of acquiring good quality longitudinal datasets are high,<sup>9</sup> and where much qualitative work is done by visiting/ peripatetic foreign researchers, rather than local researchers who can more easily conduct repeat visits.

### 3. The Depth and Severity of Poverty

The dominant approach to poverty has been to view it in terms of lack of income or consumption. The informational requirement of such a measure is fairly limited, which makes it easy to apply – particularly in relation to other more complex notions of poverty. This section considers four different ways of conceptualising and measuring poverty in the income or consumption space. These approaches involve: (a) counting the poor (the headcount); (b) measuring income shortfalls (the income gap); (c) allowing for income inequality among the poor (distribution sensitive measures); and (d) allowing for the specification of vague or imprecise poverty line (fuzzy measures of poverty).<sup>10</sup> Each of these approaches add something distinct to our understanding of poverty and it worth remembering that these methods can be applied beyond the income and consumption space (see Dercon, forthcoming).

One of the simplest and most widely used measures of poverty is the headcount index, which involves counting the number of people below a defined poverty line, and expressing this as a proportion of the total population. Leaving aside the very real issue of where to draw the poverty line (at least for now), it can be shown that the headcount measure says nothing about the *extent* or *magnitude* of income shortfalls below the poverty line.<sup>11</sup> Thus, a reduction in the income of any person currently below the poverty line will leave the headcount unchanged, *ceteris paribus* (Sen,

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<sup>9</sup> This is because poor official records make samples difficult to identify and track; households and streets in poor areas are often not numbered or named; many migrants do not leave forwarding addresses; several languages may be required in a small area; and interviewers are poorly trained, inter alia.

<sup>10</sup> There is also a literature on the incompleteness of welfare judgments and the use of multiple poverty lines, which relates to the ‘dominance’ or ‘stochastic dominance’ approach discussed by Atkinson (1987) and Foster and Shorrocks (1988) among others. This literature is not pursued in this paper.

<sup>11</sup> One simple but very partial means of tackling this problem is to identify two or more poverty lines. In the late 1980s Rahman and Hossain (1995) used this device very effectively in Bangladesh to distinguish between the ‘moderate poor’, with expenditures permitting a calorie intake of 2112 calories a day, and the ‘extreme poor’, able to access only 1740 calories per day. An implicit assumption of this work was that the extreme poor are also chronically poor. Later work has shown that this is only partly true (Sen, 2003). This ‘two lines’ approach is now applied at the global level with the \$1 and \$2 poverty lines used by the World Bank and UN (World Bank, 2001).



1981, p.11).<sup>12</sup> For this reason the headcount is sometimes supplemented with the income (poverty) gap. This measure gives the aggregate shortfall of income of all the poor from the poverty line. The income gap ratio is then given by the percentage shortfall of the mean income of the poor from the poverty line (see Sen, 1976, pp.220-221, 223; Sen, 1981, p.33). Like the headcount, the income gap ‘is completely insensitive to transfers of income among the poor so long as nobody crosses the poverty line...’ (Sen, 1981, p.33).<sup>13</sup> Unlike the headcount, however, it pays no attention whatsoever to the number or proportion of people below the poverty line (Sen, 1976, p.220; 1981, p.33).

Given these limitations Sen proposes combining information provided by the headcount (how many) and income gap ratio (how far on average below the poverty line) with a measure of inequality below the poverty line. The result is what has become known as the Sen poverty index. This measure uses an ordinal rather than a cardinal system of weights to compare the incomes of people below the poverty line. Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (1984) have refined Sen’s work to produce a measure of poverty that is additively decomposable (e.g. by different sub-groups) and which takes the relevant weights to be the distance between actual income and the poverty line. Their measure is expressed as a combination of the headcount ratio, the income gap ratio and a measure of inequality shown to be the squared coefficient of variation.

All of the measures discussed so far incorporate the headcount, and therefore depend upon the identification of a poverty line. Selecting an appropriate poverty line raises a range of practical and methodological challenges (see Ravallion, 1998; Kanbur and Squire, 1999). For the purpose of making international comparisons the poverty line is often set at 1US\$ per day in terms of 1985 PPP (World Bank, 1990). A related approach involves deriving poverty lines from estimates of ‘minimal nutritional requirements’ or ‘consumption norms’ in particular societies.<sup>14</sup> While this may allow for the fact that nutritional and commodity requirements often vary from one country to another, it neglects the fact that these requirements can also vary quite widely within specific countries (especially among different groups of people and across regions) (e.g. Sen, 1981, p.12). There are also difficulties in terms of defining these requirements, which depend on the choice of commodities and assumptions about the proportion of income spent on food, *inter alia* (see Sen, 1981, pp.11-14).

A different approach involves estimating a subjective poverty line based on qualitative perceptions of ‘consumption adequacy’ among the poor (e.g. Pradhan and Ravallion, 2000). While this approach is clearly bottom up, an allowance inevitably has to be made for ‘heterogeneity’, as views about what constitutes poverty differ (*ibid.*, p.462). Moreover, there is no guarantee that a poverty line derived from this

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<sup>12</sup> The headcount measure therefore violates Sen’s (1976) monotonicity axiom, which demands that: ‘Given other things, a reduction in income of a person below the poverty line must increase the poverty measure’ (p.219).

<sup>13</sup> The income gap measure (like the headcount measure) therefore violates Sen’s (1976) transfer axiom, which demands that: ‘Given other things, a pure transfer of income from a person below the poverty line to anyone who is richer must increase the poverty measure’ (p.219).

<sup>14</sup> The \$1 per day poverty line is, at least in theory, supposed to loosely reflect living requirements in poor countries.

method will permit everyone to satisfy their nutritional/ commodity requirements if these requirements vary.<sup>15</sup> Yet another approach involves abandoning the poverty line altogether in favour of a more inclusive approach that gives positive weight to the entire distribution, e.g. the overall mean (see Ravallion, 1994). This approach, however, does not permit us to distinguish between the poor and non-poor!

Once a poverty line is chosen the construction of poverty profiles may be hampered by measurement errors. In the case of poverty profiles relating to households rather than individuals various assumptions have to be made about equivalence scales, which can introduce further distortions (for a discussion of equivalence scales see Lanjouw and Ravallion, 1995; Deaton, 1997, p.241). Finally, the fact that income is often unevenly distributed within the household should also be taken into account. For these reasons many scholars have proposed a more direct method for evaluating poverty, which considers the things people actually manage to achieve (see the following section).<sup>16</sup>

Another way of dealing with many of these problems is to allow for ‘vagueness’ or imprecision in terms of defining poverty lines. Cerioli and Zani (1990), for example, allow for the specification of a continuous range of poverty lines and rank the poor according to their level of disadvantage. From this information it is possible to compute the degree to which a person or group of people belong to the sub set of the poor. This measure is absolute and captures the subject’s proximity to the lowest specified poverty line. Cheli and Lemmi (1995) have criticised the arbitrary selection of poverty lines in this approach. They have developed an alternative fuzzy set theoretic measure that is *totally relative* in that it automatically equates the lowest (highest) achieved income with the lowest (highest) poverty lines. In this measure the degree to which a person or group belongs to the sub-set of the poor depends on the proportion of people with higher incomes. Clark and Qizilbash (2002) provide a formal treatment of these measures and consider their relevance for measuring different aspects of poverty.

#### **4. The Breadth and Multidimensionality of Poverty**

While the concern with measuring poverty in terms of income and commodity command has persisted, economists and other social scientists have increasingly recognised the need to broaden their conceptions of human poverty and development. Writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s – often under the auspice of the International Labour Organisation – Dudley Seers was amongst the first to call for the ‘dethronement of GNP’. According to Seers

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<sup>15</sup> Pradhan and Ravallion (2000) point out that ‘people in poor areas perceive themselves to be even poorer than objective comparisons suggest’ (p.470), which implies they might set higher poverty lines. Recent work by Clark and Qizilbash (forthcoming) however, suggests that poor people set very tough standards for someone to qualify as poor.

<sup>16</sup> The income approach, however, does preserve an element of freedom by focusing on the ability to meet needs (irrespective of whether or not the person actually chooses to use that ability) (Sen, 1981, pp.26-7).

[t]he [relevant] questions to ask about a country's development are... What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the results development, even if per capita income had doubled... (Seers, 1969, p.3).

Such concerns gave rise to the emphasis on 'growth with redistribution' and then to the basic needs approach to development in the 1970s and early 1980s (see Streeten, 1995; Stewart, 1996 and forthcoming), which provided the impetus for the social indicators movement. Increasingly the emphasis moved from securing the *means* for eliminating poverty and achieving development (e.g. employment, equitable growth, access to basic need goods and services) to promoting the *ends* of human development.<sup>17</sup>

The shift in emphasis from means to ends gave rise to the development of Amartya Sen's capability approach (CA), which was first described in his 1979 Tanner Lectures at Stanford University (Sen, 1980; 1985; 1999). The foundations for the CA stem from Sen's critiques of utility (happiness, pleasure, desire-fulfilment) and resource (income, wealth, commodity command) based concepts of human poverty and development (see Crocker, 1992; Clark, 2002, ch.2; forthcoming). In particular, Sen (1982) argued that many types of non-utility information are relevant for the assessment of poverty and well-being.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, there is no guarantee that this information will be adequately reflected in utility functions due to various distortions typically associated with poverty (e.g. adaptation, social conditioning, etc). It follows that we should concern ourselves with the full range of human function(ing)s ('beings' and 'doings') and capabilities (opportunities to function) that constitute a good form of life. According to Sen (1983, p.754) 'being able to live long, escape avoidable morbidity, be well-nourished, be able to read, write and communicate and take part in literary and scientific pursuits and so forth' are all examples of valuable capabilities. In this framework poverty is construed as 'basic capability failure'. Notice that while poverty is absolute in the capability space, it is relative in the income or commodity space. In other words the CA recognises that people are heterogeneous and typically require different resource endowments to achieve the same functionings (see Sen, 1999, pp.70-71). While resources have considerable instrumental significance, they are not valuable in themselves<sup>19</sup> and may also provide a misleading proxy for human poverty and development.

The CA has become increasingly influential in recent years and provides 'the strong conceptual foundation' for the human development movement (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, pp.302-303). Along with Mahbub ul Haq and others, Sen played a crucial role in terms of refining and broadening basic concepts and measurement tools for the *Human Development Reports* (published annually since 1990), which have tackled a

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<sup>17</sup> It has also been argued that a broader commitment to human development lies behind narrow economic concepts of development (see Clark, 2002, pp.19-21).

<sup>18</sup> According to Sen the relevance of non-utility information 'is the central issue involved in disputing welfarism' (Sen, 1982, p.363 and part 4).

<sup>19</sup> 'A person's well-being is not really a matter of how rich he or she is... Commodity command is a means to the end of well-being, but can scarcely be the end itself...' (Sen, 1985, p.28).

variety of issues ranging from consumption and sustainable development to poverty, human rights and democracy (see Haq, 1995; Fukuda-Parr, 2003). Moreover, despite initial resistance, Sen played a crucial role in terms of developing a human development index (HDI) and human poverty index (HPI) based on three basic components relating to economic means, survival and education (UNDP, 1990; 1997). While ‘Sen was persuaded by Haq’s insistence that only a single number could shift the attention of policy makers from material output to human well-being as a measure of progress’ (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p.305), he remains concerned that such crude summary statistics cannot capture either the breadth or complexity of the human development approach:

The Human Development Index (HDI) was devised explicitly as a rival to GNP – indeed as a similarly coarse measure as the GNP but not oblivious of everything other than products and incomes. Not surprisingly, it has a boorishness that is somewhat similar to that of the GNP... By focusing on some of the aspects of human lives – such as longevity and education – the HDI takes us well beyond the narrow limits of concentrating only on objects of convenience.

However, the breadth of the human development approach must not be confused with the slender specificity of the Human Development Index. The latter – the HDI – can compete with the GNP in terms of ready usability, in a way that the very broad and sophisticated human development analysis ... cannot. (Sen, forthcoming; see also Sen, 2000, p.22).

In contrast to the HDI/ HPI and other summary statistics of human poverty and development (such as the physical quality of life index), the CA has the potential to accommodate the entire range of ‘beings’ and ‘doings’ that constitute a good form of life (see, for example, Clark, 2002, ch.2; forthcoming). There is, however, a crucial stumbling block. While Sen provides isolated examples of intrinsically valuable capabilities (and more recently has admitted to using various lists of capabilities), he has refused to endorse a unique list of functionings or capabilities as ‘objectively correct’ for practical and strategic reasons (Sen, 1993, p.43; 2004; see also Clark, 2002; Qizilbash, 2002b).

One well-known attempt to complete the CA has been made by Martha Nussbaum. Drawing heavily on Aristotle, Nussbaum (1990; 1995; 2000) has developed a list of central human capabilities. The latest version of this list (which has not changed that much over the years) covers: (1) *Life*; (2) *Bodily health*; (3) *Bodily integrity*; (4) *Senses, imagination and thought*; (5) *Emotions*; (6) *Practical reason*; (7) *Affiliation*; (8) *Other species*; (9) *Play*; and (10) *Political and Material Control over one’s Environment* (Nussbaum, 2003, pp.41-42).<sup>20</sup> Attempts to identify valuable capabilities can be criticised on the grounds that they are potentially paternalistic or tend to neglect historical or cultural differences. Nussbaum, however, argues that later versions of her list reflect ‘years of cross-cultural discussion’ (Nussbaum, 2000, p.76). Closer inspection, however, suggests that nearly all the items on Nussbaum’s list are derived from the writings of Aristotle (see Nussbaum, 1990, n.52-65; Clark, 2002, ch.3). Moreover, confronting Nussbaum’s list of central human capabilities with the

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<sup>20</sup> See Alkire (2002, ch.2), Clark (2002, ch.3) and Saith (2001) for summaries and discussions of other prominent lists. Ingrid Robeyns (2003) has recently developed a procedural account of human capabilities for evaluating gender inequality in Western Societies.

values and experiences of the poor implies some revisions might be in order (see Clark, 2000; 2002; 2003; Okin, 2003).

While the CA provides the philosophical foundation for a broad concept and measure of human poverty and well-being, there are well-known difficulties in terms of making the approach operational.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the CA requires a great deal of information (about the various functionings and capabilities involved), which may not be readily available – especially when it comes to making international comparisons. Moreover, it is not only necessary to identify the relevant capabilities for the task in hand (over which there may or may not be broad agreement),<sup>22</sup> but to take a stand on the relevant cut offs or thresholds that denote poverty (well-being) for each of the capabilities in question. One promising response to these kinds of difficulties involves developing a methodology that can capture some of this ambiguity. Enrica Chiappero Matinetti (1996; 2000), for example, has developed a version of the CA that views deprivation (well-being) ‘as a broad and fuzzy concept that is intrinsically complex and vague in the sense that it is not possible to contain within clear and unquestionable boundaries’ (Chiappero Matinetti, 2000, p.213). Instead of drawing clearly defined cut offs between opposite modalities (e.g. poor and non-poor), she recognises that deprivation (and well-being) are vague predicates that manifest themselves in varying degrees (ibid.). Arguably, however, Chiappero Matinetti approach does not capture all of the ambiguity or imprecision that resides in the CA. An alternative approach that considers an additional level of vagueness (which is concerned with the actual dimensions of poverty and well-being) is considered in the final section of this paper.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the rapid increase in interest in the CA and poverty generally in recent years, virtually nothing has been written about time in the context of multidimensional concepts and measures of poverty. Nearly all studies that attempt to integrate time into the conceptualisation, measurement and analysis of poverty are concerned with the income or consumption space (see McKay and Lawson, 2003, p.425) rather than with some broader notion of human poverty and deprivation – although the available evidence suggests such studies may tell a very different story about the nature and dynamics of poverty (see Baulch and Masset, 2003). A notable exception is Marco Grasso’s (2002) attempt to explore the possibility of making the CA operational using system dynamics. Grasso tries to simulate a set of three functionings over time, given various assumptions about commodities and personal and social conversion factors that transform these commodities into human function(ing)s or well-being. In the end, however, Grasso recognises that his assumptions are ‘rather restrictive’ and insists that ‘[t]he ultimate purpose of the model, at this stage, is to verify the use of system dynamics in order to clarify knowledge and understanding of the empirical

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<sup>21</sup> Alkire (2002), Clark (2002) and Saith (2001) have tried to pave the way for making the CA operational.

<sup>22</sup> Defining the parameters of the CA requires us to make value judgements, which may be controversial (see Sugden, 1993). While Sen is not willing to endorse a universal list of capabilities, he is reasonably optimistic about the chances of reaching agreement about the basic functionings relevant for poverty analysis (see Alkire, 2002, p.157 and n.19; Clark, 2002, pp.53-54).

<sup>23</sup> The existence of this type of vagueness is controversial. To date it has only been discussed by Qizilbash (2000; 2003).



potentiality of the capability approach, and not to offer conclusive information regarding well-being...' (Grasso, 2002, p.14). While this line of inquiry may prove fruitful, this paper is primarily concerned with measuring, and assessing the dynamics of, various capabilities over time, rather than with the prediction or projection of future functionings.<sup>24</sup>

## 5. The Duration of Poverty

The advances of the 1970s and 1980s that characterise multidimensionality and depth/severity in the conceptualisation of poverty were not matched for the meta dimension of time. In particular, serious work on duration only began to emerge in the late 1980s (Bane and Ellwood, 1986; Gaiha, 1988; 1989). An unwritten assumption of much poverty research at that time was that the persistence of poverty at household level was highly correlated with the severity of poverty in income/consumption measures. The empirical testing of this assumption (Gaiha, 1989) helped to stimulate interest in duration in a period when panel datasets were just becoming available for a number of developing countries.

In the early 1990s the number of conceptual and empirical studies began to increase (Gaiha, 1992; Gaiha and Deollikar, 1993; Morduch, 1994; Grootaert and Kanbur, 1995) but it was not until 2000 that a collection of papers on this theme was brought together (Baulch and Hoddinott, 2000). Three important observations must be noted about the literature that evolved over this period. First, that it was largely the work of economists and econometricians trying to distinguish chronic poverty from transitory<sup>25</sup> poverty by analysing panel data and identifying factors that correlated with mobility or lack of mobility. Secondly, virtually all empirical work used income or consumption measures as its main variable. Flows, not assets or entitlements or capabilities, were the primary analytical focus. Thirdly, these studies were almost entirely quantitative and findings were, at best, only partially contextualised. We look at each of these points in turn.

The dependence of this work on the manipulation of panel data led to it being mainly of interest to econometricians and there were few links with other disciplines (e.g. sociology, anthropology and philosophy) and the less reductionist insights that they might bring. Econometricians adopted two quite different procedures for distinguishing between the chronic and transitory poor – spells approaches and

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<sup>24</sup> There are signs that capability theorists are beginning to recognise that time should explicitly feature in their analysis of poverty and well-being. For example, the fourth international conference on the capability approach at the University of Pavia in Italy (September 2004) included four papers on 'dynamics and adaptive preference' (see <http://cfs.unipv.it/ca2004/program.htm>). One of these papers argues that 'time is a central element in the objective assessments that individuals make about their lives, in the criteria that individuals choose to evaluate their well-being, and in their sense of agency and autonomy' (Comim, 2004). These papers represent work in progress and have not been formally published yet.

<sup>25</sup> Much of the literature uses the term transient poverty. We prefer the term transitory as 'transient' also refers to temporary visitors and workers and this can cause confusion.



components approaches (Yaquib, 2000a,b). The intuitively appealing spells approach identifies the chronic poor by the number or length of spells of poverty they experience. By contrast, the components approach isolates the permanent component of household income or consumption from its transitory variations and identifies the chronic poor as those whose permanent component is below the poverty line. Both approaches have their difficulties. For the spells approach it is the difficulty of specifying the threshold at which transitory poverty shifts to chronic poverty: should this be two years, or five years or ten years or more? There is inevitably a degree of arbitrariness in selecting a threshold.<sup>26</sup> If a dataset has multiple waves, does a household have to be poor all of the times it is surveyed, or only for a majority of them? For the components approach there are significant technical challenges and the distinct possibility that some households identified as chronically poor may spend significant amounts of time with non-poor levels of income or consumption (see McKay and Lawson, 2003, p.428).

Secondly, there are grave doubts about the suitability of income and/or consumption measures to undertake dynamic analyses of poverty. Flows, such as income and consumption,<sup>27</sup> are highly variable over short time periods and thus tend to report much higher levels of movements in and out of poverty than do stocks, such as anthropometric measures, literacy and material asset levels. Baulch and Masset (2003) in a study of Vietnam find that non-monetary indicators generally report higher levels of poverty persistence than do monetary indicators. The likely effects of measurement error in panel datasets compound this concern. Dercon and Krishnan (2000) concluded that measurement error might account for around half of household mobility between consumption quintiles in rural Ethiopia. It is no surprise that calls have been made to use non-monetary indicators more extensively (Baulch and Masset, 2003; McKay and Lawson, 2003) and to focus more on assets and stocks rather than flows (Carter and Barrett, 2004; Hulme and Shepherd, 2003a,b).

Thirdly, research over the 1985 to 2000 period focused almost exclusively on relatively technically sophisticated, quantitative analyses of panel data. This has helped to push forward analytical methods and identify best practices, but it has meant that most studies are weakly contextualised and that, at best, they can only identify variables that correlate with the persistence or transience of income/consumption poverty. Rarely are they able to delineate the wider underlying processes that trap people in poverty or aid their mobility out of poverty (Yaquib, 2003).

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<sup>26</sup> Hulme and Shepherd (2003a) argued for a five year threshold level but the weaknesses of some of their arguments have been pointed out (Bevan, 2004). Qizilbash (2005) argues that ‘the vagueness [or imprecision] of the predicate “chronic” needs to be taken into account’.

<sup>27</sup> Consumption is generally preferred over income for theoretical and empirical reasons. See McKay and Lawson (2003, p.428) for a discussion.

Since 2000 there has been a rapid expansion of work on poverty dynamics<sup>28</sup> and increasingly the duration of time a household experiences poverty is seen as a central element of poverty studies. Advances have occurred in each of the three problem areas discussed above. Carter and Barrett (2004) argue that the ‘second generation’ analyses of recent times can be put aside and researchers can leap frog to ‘fourth generation’ approaches. These involve ‘dynamic asset’ poverty analysis that distinguishes the effects of structural processes (e.g. lack of assets, problematic agro-ecology, social exclusion) from stochastic processes (e.g. theft of a key asset, freak hailstorm, unexpected gifts). This means that the ‘dynamically poor’ (households whose low asset levels and rates of return are likely to keep them in poverty even though at times good luck may mean they appear to be above an income/consumption poverty line) can be distinguished from the ‘structurally mobile’ (households who are likely to experience growing incomes/consumption, assets and rates of return despite shocks and bad luck). These fourth generation studies examine changes in asset levels and returns on assets that reveal the existence of household level poverty traps that people can be born into or slide/fall into.

There is also growing acknowledgement that combinations of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis can deepen the understanding of the processes that trap some in poverty and provide opportunities for others. This also permits the triangulation of findings making conclusions more robust. The case for such collaboration is made with increasing frequency (White, 2002; Kanbur, 2002; Hulme and Toye, forthcoming; Hulme and Shepherd, 2003a,b), and examples of effective practice are emerging, based on the integration of panel data analysis with life histories and other materials (Adato, Carter and May, 2004; Kabeer, 2005).

Despite the progress reported above there remain significant conceptual challenges to integrate the duration of poverty with other meta dimensions. While the shift that is underway to move from assessing poverty dynamics in terms of flows to that of assets holds great promise, and is developing in ways that may make it possible to deal with the FGT measures of severity and depth (Carter and Barrett, 2004), to date it has not been possible to integrate asset approaches with the multi dimensional nature of poverty. While Carter and Barrett (2004, p.7) recognise that ‘...assets are multidimensional, tangible and intangible...’ they find it necessary to assume ‘...for illustrative purposes that assets are one dimensional... [and can be]... non-problematically aggregated... into a one-dimensional index measure’. So, at present, the Achilles Heel of these asset approaches is multidimensionality. In the section that follows, and drawing on a different set of theoretical components than Carter and Barrett, we make an initial attempt to develop an integrated framework for the three meta dimensions of poverty.

## **6. Towards An Unified Framework: Incorporating Time into Qizilbash’s Vagueness Methodology**

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<sup>28</sup> There have been a large number of independent studies by individual/small teams of researchers. In addition, the DFID funded Chronic Poverty Research Centre ([www.chronicpoverty.org](http://www.chronicpoverty.org)) and the USAID funded BASIS CRSP work on ‘Combating Persistent Poverty in Africa’ ([www.basis.wisc.edu](http://www.basis.wisc.edu)) have focused attention on chronic poverty and poverty traps.

As we have seen the *depth*, *breadth* and *duration* of poverty all matter and are essential for understanding human misery and deprivation. These three concepts are so central to our understanding of deprivation that they can be thought of as ‘meta dimensions’ of poverty. Most of the existing literature has focused on either the depth or breadth of poverty, although some attempts have been made to combine the two (e.g. the HPI or Qizilbash’s vagueness methodology). Relatively little work has focused on the duration of poverty (see [sections 2 and 5 above](#)). Moreover, most of the work that is concerned with the duration of poverty tends to neglect the breadth and often the depth of poverty.

To date no attempt has been made to integrate the depth, breadth and duration of poverty into a unified framework. Such an ambitious project faces the conceptual, methodological and practical challenges associated with all three of the meta dimensions of poverty considered above ([sections 3-5](#)). As we have seen one particularly grave problem they share relates to Amartya Sen’s (1981, p.13) observation that poverty is a fuzzy or vague concept. Many different specifications of poverty are possible and seem plausible. Before an integrated framework for understanding poverty can be made operational we will need to know which specifications are admissible. In other words we need information on not only the dimensions of poverty that are admissible and their corresponding thresholds or critical minimal levels, but on the duration of poverty as well. Each dimension (and cut off) may be associated with different duration thresholds before it can be regarded as a deprivation, making this a potentially complex exercise.

### *6.1 Explaining and Extending Qizilbash’s Vagueness Methodology*

Several attempts have been made to develop frameworks that address the vagueness or imprecision of poverty. Nearly all of these frameworks, however, only address one type of vagueness ([Qizilbash and Clark, 2002](#)). A notable exception is Qizilbash (2000; 2003; see also Clark and Qizilbash, 2002), who distinguishes between two types of vagueness, which relate to the breadth and depth of poverty respectively. It is relatively easy to extend this framework to cover duration by introducing a third layer of vagueness. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between:

- *Horizontal Vagueness*, i.e. vagueness or imprecision about the admissible dimensions of poverty;
- *Vertical Vagueness*, i.e. vagueness about the critical minimal level in a particular dimension at or below which someone must fall to classify as poor in that dimension; and
- *Temporal Vagueness*, i.e. vagueness concerning the duration of poverty or length of time for which someone must fall at or below a threshold in a given dimension to qualify as poor in that dimension.

Qizilbash’s original framework draws on Kit Fine’s (1975) ‘superevaluationist’ theory of vague predicates. In the context of poverty, this involves working with a set of admissible dimensions of poverty (and corresponding critical minimal thresholds), which allows us to distinguish between three different groups of people:

- *The Core Poor*, i.e. those who are definitely or unambiguously poor given the many dimensions and thresholds of poverty;
- *The Non-Poor*, i.e. those who are definitely not poor given the many different specifications of poverty; and
- *The Vulnerable*, i.e. those who are neither definitely poor nor definitely non-poor in a given dimension.

Table 1 and Figure 1 attempt to clarify the framework and terminology. In Figure 1 there are five admissible dimensions of poverty (i.e.  $D_1, D_2, \dots, D_5$ ), each of which has a range of admissible poverty thresholds or critical minimal levels (for  $D_1$  the highest admissible critical minimal level is denoted by  $M_{1H}$  and the lowest admissible critical minimal level is denoted by  $M_{1L}$ ). In terms of the vagueness methodology a dimension (or threshold) ‘is admissible if it *makes sense* to treat it as a way of articulating the notion of poverty’ (Clark and Qizilbash, 2002, p.2). In other words, a dimension (threshold) counts as admissible if it plausible to view it as part of at least one possible way of specifying poverty.

**[Insert Figure 1 and Table 1 about here]**

In this framework a dimension is regarded as ‘core’ if it is part of *all* admissible specifications of poverty (in Figure 1 we assume  $D_2$  and  $D_3$  are core dimensions of poverty). To be classified as ‘core poor’ a person must be poor in terms of a core dimension. This means that s/he must fall *at or below* the lowest admissible critical minimal level in at least one core dimension of poverty (i.e. at or below  $M_{2L}$  and/or  $M_{3L}$  in Figure 1). A person counts as core poor irrespective of whether he or she is poor in terms of one core dimension (e.g.  $D_2$  or  $D_3$ ) or several core dimensions (e.g.  $D_2$  and  $D_3$ ). If a person falls at or below the lowest admissible critical minimal level in a non-core dimension (i.e.  $M_{1L}, M_{4L}$  or  $M_{5L}$ ), then s/he is poor in that dimension (i.e.  $D_1, D_4$  or  $D_5$ ). However, this does not imply that the person in question is definitely or unambiguously poor, as the relevant dimension is not part of all admissible specifications of poverty. If a person falls at or above the highest admissible critical minimal level in a particular dimension (e.g.  $M_{1H}$  or  $M_{2H}$ ), then s/he is not definitely poor in that dimension. To count as *non-poor* overall, however, a person must fall at or above the highest admissible critical minimal level for all admissible dimensions of poverty (i.e.  $M_{1H}, M_{2H}, M_{3H}, M_{4H}$ , and  $M_{5H}$  in Figure 1).

Finally, if a person is neither definitely poor nor definitely not poor in a given dimension, then s/he is regarded as *vulnerable* in that dimension (Qizilbash, 2003, p.52). In this context the notion of vulnerability is used to refer to those who are neither clearly poor nor clearly non-poor, i.e. the ambiguously (non) poor. This differs from the more common usage in the poverty literature where it refers to non-poor people who are exposed to risks (such as ill-health or crop failure) that might lead to poverty in the foreseeable future (see Ellis, forthcoming). In short, ‘vulnerability relates to the possibility of being classified as poor, rather than any risk of becoming poor’ (Qizilbash, 2003, p.52). In terms of Figure 1 a person is vulnerable to poverty in a given dimension (e.g.  $D_1$ ) if s/he falls between the highest and lowest admissible critical minimal levels in that dimension (e.g. any of the five points between  $M_{1H}$  and  $M_{1L}$ ). The extent or magnitude of vulnerability in a given dimension ( $D_1$ ) depends on proximity to the lowest admissible critical minimal level ( $M_{1L}$ ) and well as the measure of vulnerability employed. On this account the fuzzy measures of poverty

referred to in section 3 can be reinterpreted as measures of vulnerability (see Qizilbash, 2003; Qizilbash and Clark, forthcoming).<sup>29</sup>

To make this framework operational Clark and Qizilbash (2002) use the results of a survey on *The Essentials of Life*, which was administered in three different fieldwork sites in South Africa in June and July 2001.<sup>30</sup> The aim of the questionnaire was to find out which capabilities and needs (dimensions) ordinary people think are basic, and where they draw the line between the poor and non-poor (see SALDRU, 2001). Using a relaxed 95 per cent rule (which requires endorsement by at least 94.5% of people), Clark and Qizilbash found that twelve dimensions qualify as core in the South African context: clean water, health, access to health care, housing, jobs, education, freedom, nutrition, safety, self worth and respect, survival and religion. For consistency a relaxed 5 per cent rule (which requires endorsement by at least 4.5% of people) was used to identify admissible critical minimums.<sup>31</sup> For example, in the case of education (using the indicator 'years of schooling'), the proportion of respondents endorsing given poverty thresholds is as follows: no years (1.91%), 1-3 years (6.06%), 4-6 years (12.12%), 7-9 years (21.79%), 9-12 years (37.83%), 12-15 years (15.30%), over 15 years (1.81%), and 'no response' (3.19%) (Clark and Qizilbash, 2002, table 7). In this example all categories other than 'no years of schooling' and 'over 15 years of schooling' are admissible. So the lowest admissible threshold is 1-3 years of education. Everyone *below* this level is poor in terms of all admissible cut offs and is therefore definitely poor on this indicator. On the other hand, the highest admissible cut off is '12-15 years of education' and anyone *at or above* this level is definitely non-poor on this indicator. This example implies a considerable degree of vagueness concerning poverty thresholds, as the range of admissible cut offs is fairly wide (although this may not be true for all dimensions and indicators as Figure 1 implies). People who fall between the upper and lower thresholds can be treated as having some degree of membership of the set of the poor, which can be calculated using fuzzy poverty measures (Clark and Qizilbash, 2002; Qizilbash and Clark, forthcoming).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> So far Qizilbash's applications of the vagueness approach have concentrated on the core poor and those who are vulnerable to poverty in given dimensions. There has been no attempt to develop a multidimensional measure of vulnerability. Nor has there been any real attempt to identify the ambiguously (non) poor, which includes those classified as poor in non-core dimensions as well as the vulnerable.

<sup>30</sup> The survey was administered in association with the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), University of Cape Town. The areas surveyed were Kwanonqaba (a township in the Southern Cape), Murraysburg (a magisterial district in the Western Cape) and Khubus (a small isolated village in the Northern Cape). For further details see Clark and Qizilbash (2002).

<sup>31</sup> The issue of how to use questionnaire responses to select admissible poverty thresholds is discussed by Qizilbash and Clark (forthcoming).

<sup>32</sup> While proxy indicators were not available for some core dimensions of poverty and arriving at an overall headcount of the core poor involves methodological challenges, it has been estimated that at least 30 per cent of South Africans are core poor, which is higher than competing estimates of the 'most deprived' or 'ultra poor' (Clark and Qizilbash, forthcoming). In some dimensions (housing and clean water) the main problem is extreme vulnerability rather than definite poverty. It is worth noting that the South Africans interviewed set very tough standards for someone to qualify as



This brings us to the issue of incorporating time. One way of doing this is to extend Qizilbash's original framework to include *duration*. This involves introducing a new set of concepts and categories to supplement existing ones (see Table 2). In developing this framework this paper draws on the Chronic Poverty Approach and the work of the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (see Hulme, Moore and Shepherd, 2001; Hulme and Shepherd, 2003a,b; CPRC, 2004). As we have seen incorporating time and duration into the vagueness framework involves working with a third layer of vagueness, *temporal vagueness*. Introducing temporal vagueness implies a person could be classified as core poor *without* being definitely poor. This is because a person now has to fall at or below the lowest admissible threshold on a core dimension *for a given period of time* before s/he qualifies as unambiguously poor. For each dimension of poverty, it is likely that there will be a range of admissible time periods, which could plausibly be used to specify the notion of poverty (hence the 'temporal vagueness').<sup>33</sup> In keeping with the vagueness methodology a person is now classified as definitely poor if s/he falls at or below the lowest admissible threshold on a core dimension for *at least the longest* admissible period of time associated with that dimension. Such a person may be regarded as persistently or *chronically* core poor.<sup>34</sup> If the person in question does not remain at or below the lowest admissible threshold for the longest admissible time period, there will be meaningful specifications of poverty (incorporating longer duration thresholds) on which s/he does not count as definitely poor. Such a person could be regarded as *transitory* core poor. In other words s/he experiences core poverty some of the time, but never for long enough to count as chronically core poor.<sup>35</sup> Table 2 makes a similar set of distinctions relating to non-core dimensions.

**[Insert Table 2 about here]**

It is also possible to distinguish between the *chronically* vulnerable and *transitory* vulnerable using this framework. The chronically vulnerable are those who are persistently close to definite poverty in a given dimension. In terms of our framework such a person must be situated *between* the lowest and highest admissible critical minimums on a given dimension for a sustained period of time (equivalent to at least the longest admissible time period associated with that dimension) to count as chronically vulnerable in that dimension. If the person in question reaches or crosses the lowest admissible critical minimal level before the longest admissible time period

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poor. It is the methodological framework combined with survey responses that leads to higher poverty estimates.

<sup>33</sup> Identifying admissible time periods for each dimension of poverty is ultimately an empirical question that requires a new round of fieldwork.

<sup>34</sup> In terms of the chronic poverty approach developed by Hulme, Moore and Shepherd and Qizilbash's vagueness framework, such a person would be both chronically poor and core poor. This assumes, of course, that the threshold for chronic poverty is not automatically set at five years (as Hulme and Shepherd, 2003a suggest), but is adjusted to match the longest admissible time period associated with the dimension in question.

<sup>35</sup> This category could be sub-divided into the occasionally poor, sometimes poor and usually poor, defined perhaps in relation to proximity to the shortest (longest) admissible duration thresholds.



has elapsed, s/he will fall into poverty on that dimension.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, if this person reaches or passes the highest admissible critical minimal level before the longest admissible time period elapses, s/he will move into the ranks of the non-poor. Any person reaching or crossing either of these thresholds on a particular dimension before the longest admissible time period has elapsed can be regarded as transitory vulnerable on that dimension. Another kind of transitory vulnerability occurs when a person who is currently non-poor (at or above the highest admissible threshold) on a given dimension has either experienced poverty in that dimension in the recent past or is likely to move into poverty in that dimension in the near future. Once again the relevant time horizon for making this judgment corresponds to the longest admissible duration threshold associated with the dimension in question.

## 6.2 Methodological and Policy Implications

It is worth considering some of the methodological and policy implications of this framework. In terms of the original framework, for  $x$  to count as 'core poor',  $x$  must fall at or below the lowest admissible critical level in any core dimension (Clark and Qizilbash, 2002, p.2; Qizilbash, 2003, p.51). This is a defining feature of the framework. Any person doing sufficiently badly in terms of a core dimension – irrespective of his or her performance in other dimensions – is automatically classified as poor. This approach stands in stark contrast to most other multi dimensional measures of poverty (such as the human poverty index), which typically concentrates on averaging a small number of indicators. This kind of approach is problematic insofar as it conceals important deprivations in specific dimensions.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore worth retaining 'core poverty' as a separate analytical category (as in the final column of Table 2) instead of modifying it to incorporate time. To see why let us explore the issue further.

Introducing temporal vagueness into Qizilbash's framework effectively changes the criteria for definite poverty. Instead of having to fall at or below the lowest admissible poverty threshold on a core dimension in order to qualify as poor, a person must now endure this deprivation for a sustained period of time. In some cases (e.g. access to food or water) the relevant time horizon may be fairly short (hours or days at the most). In other cases (e.g. unemployment), the relevant time horizon may be fairly long (several months or even years). In terms of the extended framework anyone satisfying the relevant time horizon (i.e. the longest admissible duration threshold) associated with any core dimension is *chronically core poor*. But what about a person who is core poor, but does not satisfy the relevant time requirement(s)? Technically such a person is *not* unambiguously poor. Yet it does not make sense to claim that this person is not deprived. In practice we should be able to say, with confidence and conviction, that someone who suffers a core deprivation is seriously deprived, even if that deprivation does not persist. Some practical examples help to illustrate the point. Someone without water today or someone whose basic civil liberties have just been violated can plausibly be regarded as poor – even if s/he manages to find water when

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<sup>36</sup> If the dimension in question were core this person would also qualify as either transitory core poor or chronically core poor (depending on how long s/he remains at or below the lowest admissible poverty threshold).

<sup>37</sup> This in turn does the human development approach a disservice as the quotation from Amartya Sen in section 4 implies.

it rains or is not violently assaulted every week.<sup>38</sup> Fortunately, however, our framework is able to deal with these deprivations. In terms of Table 2 such a person counts as *transitory core poor*. This is an important category of deprivation in its own right, which is particularly useful for analysing crises and disasters such as famine or the Asian Tsunamis (among other things). While the chronically core poor is an important analytical category (possibly the single most important category), it cannot do all the work that is required as it fails to capture important forms of deprivation.

Notice however that the extended framework only treats the chronically core poor (not the transitory core poor) as unambiguously poor. It can be argued that this approach is implausible as it is possible to be definitely poor (if one is core poor) for very short periods of time if not at a point in time. An alternative way of incorporating time and duration into a vagueness framework has been suggested by Mozaffar Qizilbash in conversations with David Clark (see also Qizilbash, 2005). Qizilbash proposes dispensing with temporal vagueness and treating ‘chronic’ as a vague predicate alongside ‘poverty’. In this system – which has not yet been developed – the core poor are the unambiguously poor (as in the original framework). It is therefore possible to say that someone is definitely poor at a point in time. So there is no ambiguity involved in classifying someone without water today or a one off assault victim as unambiguously poor. Qizilbash then proposes a separate exercise to establish if a person’s condition is ‘chronic’ in certain dimensions. This involves working with a set of admissible time periods that correspond to specific dimensions and thresholds (as with temporal vagueness). A person’s condition is regarded as definitely chronic in a given dimension if he or she is poor for all admissible time periods associated with the dimension and threshold in question.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is possible to be definitely poor in a core dimension *irrespective* of whether or not the condition is chronic.

Qizilbash is concerned because our version of the extended framework would ‘not be able to judge that a famine victim who is very seriously malnourished at a point in time is unambiguously poor’ (Qizilbash, 2005, note 9). There are several possible responses to this argument. First it is not clear that it is possible to experience poverty at a point in time. Time moves forward continuously and cannot be suspended. All forms of deprivation (including serious malnutrition and even the final transition from life to death itself) occur over a finite period of time (although in some cases the period of time in question may be fairly short and perceived as momentary). If time were suspended it might not be possible to experience poverty at all. Second, a person suffering from certain core deprivation (such as serious malnutrition) for fairly short periods of time may be classified as definitely (chronically core) poor in our system. It takes time to become severely hungry and seriously malnourished (see for example Sen’s (1981, Ch. 6.1) outline of the 1943 Bengal famine). Moreover it is likely that

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<sup>38</sup> In addition certain deprivations may have lasting consequences (e.g. stunting, physical impairment, death, mental trauma, loss of confidence, etc), even if they are experienced for extremely short periods of time.

<sup>39</sup> If this person’s condition is definitely chronic in a core dimension at or below the lowest admissible poverty threshold, then he or she can be classified as ‘chronically core poor’. Qizilbash’s definition of the chronically core poor is essentially the same as the one proposed above, although it is part of a different philosophical system.

the admissible time periods associated with such dimensions will be quite short. Third, even if this person does not qualify as unambiguously poor (i.e. chronically core poor), our framework would still recognise that he or she is seriously deprived (i.e. transitory core poor) as discussed above. In cases where the person in question is not poor for all admissible time periods it follows (at least in our framework) that there must be plausible specifications of poverty on which he or she would not qualify as poor. This brings us to a fundamental difference between our framework and the approach envisaged by Qizilbash. In our framework time in terms of duration is an integral part of the concept of poverty. In Qizilbash's approach poverty has breadth and depth but not duration.<sup>40</sup> Much of this paper, however, has been devoted to arguing that time and duration matter for understanding poverty (Sections 2 and 5). Both ways of extending the original framework have merit and more work is required to explore the implications of incorporating time in each of these ways. For now we tentatively stick with our framework (the only framework articulated so far) and look forward to further exchanges with colleagues in the hope of developing a better system.

The extended framework summarised in Table 2 effectively juxtaposes the chronic poverty approach (summarised in the first column) with Qizilbash's vagueness methodology (summarised in the first row). This has the advantage of combining and enriching the policy insights from each approach. For example, following the poverty and vagueness approach we can distinguish between: (1) core poverty prevention (policy measures designed to prevent the vulnerable from falling into definite poverty in specific dimensions); and (2) core poverty eradication (policy measures designed to eliminate poverty in certain dimensions) (Clark and Qizilbash, 2002). Moreover, following the chronic poverty approach, we might analyse the characteristics of the 'chronically poor', 'transitory poor' and 'never poor' and consider the factors that allow people to move between these categories (see Hulme and Shepherd, 2003a,b; CPRC, 2004; Hulme, forthcoming). This kind of approach provides important clues about the causes and consequences of poverty as well as insights into strategies for dealing with human deprivation. Finally, juxtaposing these frameworks generates new policy insights. For example, we might ask why some people (groups) *are chronically core poor* while others are *transitory core poor* or *transitory vulnerable*.

## 7. Summary and Conclusions

This paper has made the case that time, and in particular duration, has been neglected in the conceptualisation and measurement of poverty until relatively recently. It has sought to develop a unified framework in which the meta dimensions of poverty (breadth, depth and duration) can be brought together by drawing on Qizilbash's poverty and vagueness approach and the emerging literature on chronic poverty. To date, the vagueness methodology has neglected time and has not yet been used to analyse the dynamics of poverty. In contrast, much of the chronic poverty literature focuses on a single dimension of poverty (typically income or consumption) and does not make a sharp distinction between poverty and vulnerability. Allowing for multi-

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<sup>40</sup> For Qizilbash time is only an integral part of the 'chronic poverty' concept. Qizilbash also acknowledges that time is a dimension of poverty (correspondence with Clark, 30 March 2005).

dimensionality allows us to study different forms of poverty, consider how they relate to one another and say something concrete about inter sectoral policies and priorities, e.g. in the spheres of health, housing, water, etc. (e.g. Qizilbash, 2002a). Moreover, as we have seen the vagueness framework can be used to distinguish between poverty prevention policies (aimed at preventing the vulnerable from falling into core poverty) and poverty eradication policies (aimed at directly tackling core poverty itself) (see Clark and Qizilbash, 2002).

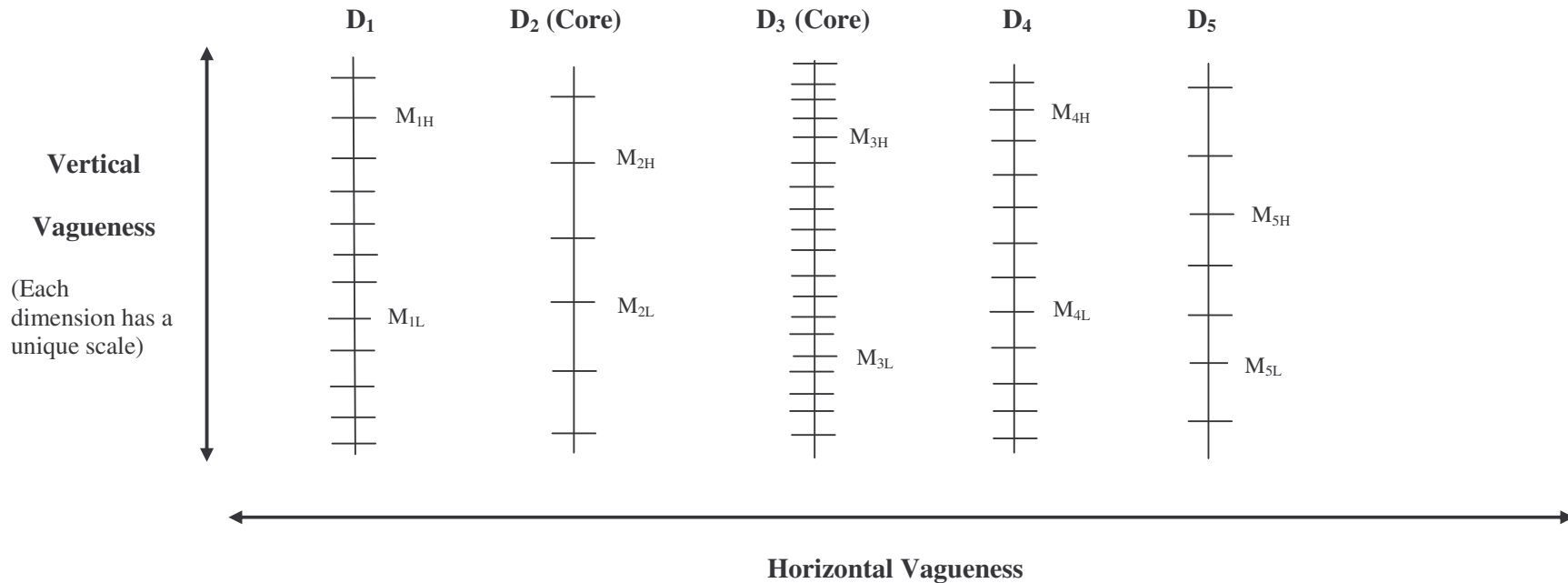
Incorporating time into a unified framework for understanding poverty along the lines suggested provides a promising approach for conceptualising, measuring and analysing poverty. Such an approach combines the strengths of these two frameworks and should be able to deal with multiple specifications of poverty (incorporating three layers of vagueness), allow for multidimensionality and the sectoral analysis of poverty, make subtle distinctions between poverty and vulnerability and analyse the dynamics of poverty among different groups of people. On their own neither the chronic poverty framework nor the vagueness methodology can do all these tasks well. Arguably a more holistic approach, along the lines suggested here, could deepen the understanding of poverty and sharpen policy analysis more than most existing frameworks.

**Table 1: Key Terms and Concepts relating to Qizilbash's Vagueness Methodology**

| <b>Terms</b>  | <b>Meaning</b>  | <b>Example of operationalising the term</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| Dimension of poverty  | Any admissible component of the poverty concept. A dimension is admissible if it is plausible to view it as part of at least one possible way of defining the meaning of poverty. | Any dimension of poverty (capability or need) identified by the South African poor in Clark and Qizilbash's survey on <i>The Essentials of Life</i> . In the South African context countless different dimensions can be distinguished.  |
| Core dimension of poverty   | A dimension which is part of <i>all</i> admissible specifications of poverty.   | Any dimension of poverty identified by at least 95 percent of respondents (which allows a suitable margin for error). In the South African context 12 dimensions qualify as 'core': clean water, health, access to health care, housing, jobs, education, freedom, nutrition, safety, self worth and respect, survival and religion. |
| Critical minimal level (of a dimension of poverty)                          | Any admissible specification of a poverty threshold for a particular dimension.   | In the case of education (years of schooling), Clark and Qizilbash found that cut offs in the range of 1 to 15 years are admissible in the South African context.  |
| Lowest admissible critical minimal level (of a dimension of poverty)        | The level at or below which a person is judged to be definitely poor in a given dimension.  | In the case of education (years of schooling), Clark and Qizilbash found that the lowest admissible poverty threshold is 1-3 years of schooling.   |
| Highest admissible critical minimal level (of a dimension of poverty)       | The level at or above which a person is judged to be definitely non-poor in a given dimension.  | In the case of education (years of schooling), Clark and Qizilbash found the highest admissible poverty threshold is 12 to 15 years of schooling.  |
| Core poor   | A person who is definitely poor (at or below the lowest admissible critical minimum) in terms of at least one core dimension.   | Clark and Qizilbash estimate that at least 30 per cent of South Africans are core poor.  |
| Vulnerable (measured in terms of proximity to poverty in a given dimension) | Someone that is neither definitely poor nor non-poor in a given dimension, i.e. they are between the lowest and highest critical minimal levels in that dimension.                | In the case of South Africa, Clark and Qizilbash found that in certain dimensions (notably housing and clean water) the main problem is extreme vulnerability rather than definite poverty.  |
| Non-Poor  | Someone who is at or above the highest admissible critical minimal levels for all admissible dimensions of poverty.   | Headcount not estimated by Clark and Qizilbash.  |

Source: Qizilbash (2003) and Clark and Qizilbash (2002).

**Figure 1: A Diagrammatic Representation of Core Poverty, Vulnerability and Being Non-Poor**



**Notes**

1. In this diagram there are 5 admissible dimensions of poverty. Two dimensions,  $D_2$  and  $D_3$  are ‘core’ dimensions.
2. For each dimension there are a range of admissible, critical minimum levels (poverty thresholds). For  $D_1$  the highest admissible minimum level is  $M_{1H}$  (at or above which a person is not poor in this dimension) and the lowest admissible minimum level is  $M_{1L}$  (at or below which the person is definitely poor on this dimension).
3. Dimensions may be core (i.e. admissible on all plausible specifications of poverty) or non-core (admissible on at least one but not all specifications of poverty). The core poor are those who fall at or below  $M_{2L}$  and/or  $M_{3L}$ .



**Table 2: Integrating Qizilbash’s Vagueness Methodology with the Chronic Poverty Approach**

|                          | <b>Non poor</b>   | <b>Vulnerable*</b>  | <b>Poor in a non-core dimension</b>         | <b>Core poor</b>   |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Never Poor</b>        | Non poor and secure   | N/A   | N/A   | N/A  |
| <b>Transitory poor**</b> | <i>Transitory Vulnerable Type I</i> , i.e. people that are not definitely poor at the moment, but have either experienced poverty or vulnerability in the past and/or are likely to experience it in the near future. | <i>Transitory Vulnerable Type II</i> , i.e. people that are sometimes vulnerable to poverty in a given dimension that may or may not be core. # | Sometimes poor in non core dimension(s)     | <i>Transitory core poor</i> , i.e. people who sometimes experience poverty in at least one core dimension.   |
| <b>Chronically Poor</b>  | N/A   | <i>Chronically vulnerable</i> , i.e. persistently vulnerable to definite poverty in a given dimension, which may or may not be core.            | Persistently poor in non core dimension(s). | <i>Chronically Core Poor</i> , i.e. persistently poor in terms of at least one core dimension of poverty. ## |

\* Measures of extreme vulnerability to poverty are dimension specific.

\*\* This category could be sub-divided into the occasionally poor, sometimes poor and usually poor.

# This category includes: (a) people currently classified as vulnerable; and (b) people who move in out of poverty (i.e. cross the lowest admissible threshold) as well as people who move in and out of vulnerability (i.e. cross the highest admissible threshold).

## Allows for the possibility that individuals might move out of poverty in one core dimension, but back into poverty in another core dimension.

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