Chapter 13
Beyond the Redistributive Paradigm: What Philosophers Can Learn from Poor-Led Politics

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Abstract Philosophical approaches to alleviating global poverty have overlooked the contributions and insights of poor-led social and political movements. This failure to engage with the strategies and perspectives of poor communities is bound up with global justice theorists' neglect of issues of social and political power in their prescriptions for global poverty reduction. One cause of this neglect is the prominence of the "sufficiency" doctrine, which treats poverty as strictly a matter of material lack and unmet needs. This view gives rise to the belief that poverty can best be redressed through judicious redistributive measures to reduce absolute low-welfare. Yet these assumptions are increasingly at odds with the multidimensional and relational approach to poverty that has emerged in anti-poverty policy and development studies. This approach takes structural inequalities, social exclusion, and relations of subordination and disempowerment to be central to the experience of poverty. Two emerging ethical approaches to deprivation – one emphasizing social exclusion and disempowerment, and one focusing on humiliation and misrecognition – better grasp the relational aspects of poverty. By shifting to a relational understanding of poverty and paying closer attention to the aims and strategies of poor-led organizations and movements, global justice theorists can start to think more expansively about the goals – and agents – of global poverty reduction. I illustrate the significance of looking to poor communities as agents of poverty reduction by discussing the *Slum/Shack Dwellers International* (SDI), a global grassroots network of organizations dedicated to empowering communities of pavement and slum dwellers.

Keywords Poor-led social and political movements • Multidimensional and relational approach to poverty • Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI)

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13.1 Introduction

Poverty activists and scholars have long noted the transformative potential of poor-led social initiatives and policies that aim to empower poor communities (Green 2008; Lister 2013). Development theorists and practitioners generally agree that successful development requires *meaningful* participation by the poor in shaping and implementing development practices (Chambers 1997; Hickey and Mohan 2004, 2005), and also aims at their empowerment. Yet, curiously, philosophical approaches to the problems of global poverty and inequality have attributed accorded little if any significance to the priorities, strategies, and initiatives of the poor themselves, as expressed through their social and political organizations and collective movements. Instead, philosophers have asked a trio of questions that take for granted the idea that rich states and their institutions are the proper agents of global justice (Deveaux 2015): do they have obligations to alleviate the poverty of the distant poor? (Miller 2010; Risse 2005; Wenar 2003); if so, what are these duties, and what grounds them? (O'Neill 2000; Pogge 2008, Singer 1972, 2010); and how can states and other responsible agents best be motivated to dispatch them? (Lenard 2012; Lichtenberg 2014).

This familiar philosophical conversation sees acute poverty primarily as a problem of unmet needs, the remedy for which is an urgent global redistribution of resources needed for well-being. The distributive framework within which these Kantian/Rawlsian and Utilitarian scholars generally think thus sets the parameters of poverty-reducing obligations. But while humanitarian crises, such as famine or mass refugee migrations, warrant a focus on the urgent redistribution of resources, the problem of chronic poverty arguably demands that ethicists explore the underlying sources of the poor's powerlessness and engage with proposals and efforts that aim to empower poor communities on their own terms. The present chapter tries to motivate this shift by examining in more detail *why* philosophers have overlooked poor-led social movements in their discussions of global poverty, and by sketching some of the important political insights that poor-led politics holds for normative approaches to poverty alleviation.

Below, in part I, I trace the omission of poor-led movements and perspectives from global justice theorizing to the prominence of "sufficiency thinking" in philosophical writing about poverty and inequality. First advanced by Harry Frankfurt, the sufficiency doctrine asserts that we should care morally about absolute deprivation or low levels of welfare – and about people who fall below the threshold required for a good life – but *not* about relative inequalities (1987). Although his view has been extensively criticized, resulting in more nuanced and sophisticated versions of the sufficiency thesis (Benbaji 2005; Huseby 2010), two intertwined assumptions at the heart of the sufficiency doctrine continue to influence philosophical discussions of poverty: the view that poverty is strictly about material lack and unmet needs; and the belief that such deprivation can best be redressed through judicious redistributive measures to reduce absolute low-welfare. These assumptions are increasingly at odds with the multidimensional and relational approach to

poverty (Mosse 2010) that has emerged in policy and development studies, which takes structural inequalities, social exclusion, and relations of subordination and disempowerment to be at the heart of the experience of poverty. It is not a coincidence that, in their activism, poor-led social movements and organizations in the global South target precisely these harms.

In part II, I discuss two normative ethical approaches to deprivation that are broadly in tune with the relational approach to poverty: one that emphasizes social exclusion and disempowerment (Kabeer 2000; Wisor 2012), and one that focuses on humiliation and misrecognition (Dügben 2012; Schweiger 2014; Graf and Schweiger 2013, 2014). In part III, I discuss the *Slum/Shack Dwellers International* (SDI), a grassroots network of organizations in 33 countries dedicated to empowering communities of pavement and slum dwellers. Analyzing the aims, strategies, and successes of groups like SDI, I argue, should lead us to think more expansively about the goals, strategies, and agents of global poverty reduction. Part IV sets out the reasons why the insights and contributions of poor-led social organizations and movements should figure centrally in normative theories of poverty alleviation.

13.2 Poverty as Insufficiency?

The omission of the perspectives and contributions of the organizations and movements of the poor from normative discussions of global poverty reduction has much to do with the over-simplistic picture of poverty at the heart of redistributive approaches to transnational justice. Theorists who emphasize redistribution as a broad solution to chronic and acute poverty disagree on whether the goal should be merely to raise the distant poor up to a level of sufficiency (Blake 2001; Nagel 2005) or instead aim for more egalitarian ends, such as global equality of opportunity, equal respect, or equal capability to achieve a minimum level of functioning (Brock 2009; Caney 2001; Gilabert 2012; Satz 2010). But, as I shall argue, neither sufficiency nor egalitarian approaches to global justice pays much attention to the poor as agents of justice, or to proposals for radical changes to relations and structures that disempower and disenfranchise the poor (Nielsen 1985; Schweickart 2008).

Global redistribution approaches that endorse the sufficiency principle are particularly problematic insofar as they dismiss the significance of inequalities as well as nonmaterial aspects of poverty, such as humiliation and disempowerment. Sufficiency proponents argue that global redistribution should aim not at egalitarian ends but strive instead to meet people's basic unmet needs, the nonfulfillment of which causes them to suffer or prevents them from living a decent life. Michael Blake (2001, 259–260) insists that 'liberalism can concern itself with absolute deprivation abroad, and reserve a concern for relative deprivation in the local arena….Shared citizenship…gives rise to a concern with relative deprivation that is absent in the international realm.' Similarly, Thomas Nagel argues that duties of justice simply do not apply in the global context, because the coercive (sovereign state) institutions that ground these reciprocal duties are simply lacking; instead,

only 'humanitarian duties [arise]…in virtue of the absolute rather than the relative level of need of the people we are in a position to help' (Nagel 2005, 119).

The view that the governments and institutions of rich states have an obligation to address the absolute deprivation of the global poor but not relative inequalities between states (or national populations) echoes the sufficientarian reasoning developed by Frankfurt and others. Although the sufficiency doctrine has been subjected to incisive criticisms from proponents of relational equality and democratic equality (Anderson 1999; Casal 2007), its legacy is evidenced by the tendency within global justice theorizing to treat North-South poverty primary as a problem of unjust distribution rather than caused by global structures of economic and political inequality and domination. It is therefore instructive to see how the sufficiency doctrine – which developed more as a critique of economic egalitarianism than as a fully-fledged normative theory of distribution – conceptualizes poverty more generally. The sufficiency doctrine's core claim is that what matters morally is that everyone has *enough*, and *not* that they have equal shares of resources or assets (Frankfurt 1987). Frankfurt rejects economic equality as an ideal on the grounds that it serves as a kind of moral distraction, diverting our attention away from discovering what is important to each of us as individuals, and from discerning what we need for our own satisfaction and well-being (Frankfurt 1987). His opposition to equality as an intrinsic good pivots on his claim that an egalitarian distribution 'may fail to maximize aggregate utility' and in some cases 'actually minimizes aggregate utility' (Frankfurt 1987, 30). Yet troublingly, Frankfurt generalizes from small-group examples of extreme resource scarcity (where an equal division of resources may fail to maximize survival) to reach the conclusion that economic inequality is essentially unproblematic.

Classic sufficientarians conceive of poverty and inequality in exceedingly narrow terms, mainly in reference to income and wealth (Sen 1999); arguably, this prevents them from recognizing that social and economic inequalities may yield harms not reducible to material deprivation alone. Sharply demarcating poverty from inequality in this way, Frankfurt is able to assert that 'the relationship between low economic status and urgent need is wholly contingent....There is no necessary conceptual connection between a person's relative economic position and whether he has needs of any urgency' (Frankfurt 1987, 35). Yet Frankfurt implausibly generalizes from this (not untrue) abstract claim to actually existing societies. In his critique of Ronald Dworkin's essay, 'Why Liberals Should Care About Equality,' Frankfurt (1987) insists that Dworkin, lamenting the high unemployment and the phenomenon of the working poor in the U.S., simply confuses poverty with inequality. But Frankfurt can only reach this conclusion by bracketing a range of adjacent contributors to (and consequences of) economic inequality, the acknowledgement of which undermines the case for disaggregating deprivation and inequality; inequalities in access to employment, housing, healthcare, and education, as well as in assets like land (particularly important in developing countries), all contribute to absolute low welfare. While we can of course conceptually distinguish poverty from inequality, the sufficiency lens overreaches by claiming that one can have sufficient resources for well-being entirely *irrespective of deep structural inequalities*.

Most versions of the sufficiency doctrine insist that significant inequalities are not in themselves troubling: 'If a person has enough resources to provide for the satisfac-

tion of his needs and his interests, his resources are entirely adequate; their adequacy does not depend in addition upon the magnitude of the resources that other people possess' (Frankfurt 1997, 7). More recently, however, Axelsen and Nielsen, who blend sufficientarianism with a capabilities approach, have acknowledged that there are 'positional aspects' to goods like 'societal status, political influence, and the social bases of self-respect,' (2014, 14) which can make relative inequalities somewhat morally salient. Yet they see this positional inequality as merely one more way in which *insufficiency's harms* can manifest: 'One's absolute position may, thus be determined by one's relative position, in which case a person may become insufficiently free because of a relative deprivation – but it is the insufficiency itself that creates a problem, not the inequality in itself' (15). Axelsen and Nielsen have in mind domestic, not global, problems of insufficiency, and their analysis of sufficiency as 'freedom from duress' in connection with 'a limited set of capabilities or opportunities' (2) is meant to encompass harms that do not reduce to poverty per se. Nevertheless, it is still the case that their sufficiency reasoning leads them to frame even positional social and political inequalities as fundamentally problems of distribution, not domination. Arguably, large inequalities in wealth and resources do not just *indirectly* correlate with insufficiencies, as Axelsen and Nielsen seem to suggest, but rather, correspond to real inequalities of power that in turn prevent people from accessing resources relevant to their absolute well-being (Satz 2010).

Sufficiency thinking in general seems to assume an overly sharp distinction between poverty and inequality. As a consequence, although some revised sufficientarian approaches argue that relative inequalities can prevent individuals from achieving sufficiency in many important area of well-being (Axelsen and Nielsen 2014), they do not recognize that inequalities of power, status, and political voice are *themselves* both a cause and a feature of poverty. Note that this is a different point from the criticism that 'relational egalitarians' make of both classic sufficiency theorists and distributional egalitarians. Relational (or democratic) egalitarians reject the sufficiency claim that relative socio-economic inequalities simply do not matter; inequalities typically *do* matter, say relational egalitarians, insofar as they affect the ability of citizens to interact on terms of equal respect with one another, free from discrimination, oppression, and exploitation (Anderson 1999; Satz 2010). While I concur that inequalities are often instrumental in creating oppressive relations between citizens, my claim here is a different one: namely, that significant socio-economic inequalities are closely intertwined with the political powerlessness that is itself partly *constitutive* poverty, and which locks people into chronic deprivation. If I am right, then ethicists who seek to develop solutions to global poverty need to focus much more on relations and structures of social and political inequality and exclusion than they have hitherto done. Democratic or relational equality points us in the right direction by rejecting the resource-distribution paradigm as over-simple, and by showing that inequalities create unequal social relationships, capabilities, and freedoms (Anderson 1999). They also help us to see that these relative inequalities are relevant in the global context when they contribute to gross transnational power imbalances that undermine equal opportunities and equal respect for many groups, or perpetuate relations of domination and exploitation (Brock 2009; Satz 2010).

A more thorough and in-depth analysis of poverty as consisting of pervasive relations and structures of inequality will require that we look beyond the notion of relational or democratic equality. Specifically, it demands that we look to the arguments of scholars, policy analysts, and activists who define poverty relationally, in terms of processes of social exclusion, subordination, and powerlessness. In the next section, I turn to this emerging, alternative approach to poverty, which better reflects the realities of poverty as understood by poor communities and their organizations.

13.3 Reframing Poverty: Social Exclusion, Vulnerability, and Misrecognition

In contrast to philosophical views which sharply distinguish between poverty and inequality, poverty is increasingly defined by both development economists and those who study market economies as, in effect, a consequence of structural inequalities across multiple levels (Salverda et al. 2009). This emphasis on unequal social and economic relations and structures as constitutive of poverty helps explain why economists often refer to poverty as a condition of 'social exclusion,' and why the study of poverty is increasingly called the study of 'poverty dynamics' (Addison et al. 2009). So important are these relative and relational dimensions that poverty in developed countries is usually measured using the metric of relative income: specifically, according to the OECD, those living on less than 50 % of the median income of their society are said to be poor (or 60 % for Europe). The reason for this is that, in developed societies, *relative* household income (after tax and transfers) gives a much clearer picture than does absolute income of what individuals have access to, in terms of material resources, opportunities, and activities. Or as poverty researchers explain, 'the underlying rationale [for the focus on relative income] is that those falling more than a certain 'distance' below the average or normal income in their society are unlikely to participate fully in it' (Nolan and Marx 2009, 318).

While the emphasis on relative deprivation and social exclusion has mainly been used to understand poverty in advanced industrialized societies, some researchers use it to explain poverty in developing countries as a dynamic social process involving multiple inequalities and relations of structural disadvantage (Kabeer 2000; Wisor 2012). The social exclusion analysis of poverty needs, of course, to be adapted to developing societies; for example, it needs to be acknowledge that the informal sector is often the primary workforce in poor countries, thereby changing what it means to be excluded from the formal workforce (Wisor 2012). Nonetheless, a social exclusion analysis can help us to see the multidimensional nature (and causes) of deprivation in poor countries, as well as draw our attention to the issues of power and inequality that are so important to poor-led politics. Exclusion from needed social services is very often a central component of poverty in low-income

countries (Wisor 2012), and not coincidentally, is the focus point of much pro-poor activism.

Wisor gives four reasons why the social exclusion approach makes an essential contribution to a multidimensional analysis of global poverty, even though it is not synonymous (as some argue in the case of poverty in high income countries) with poverty itself. First, it frames poverty as a 'dynamic process rather than a static state of affairs,' in which the poor suffer from 'active exclusion from public services and private markets [and] passive exclusion from social and public participation' (Wisor 2012, 117). Or, as Kabeer puts it, 'a focus on processes of exclusion is a useful way to think about social policy because it draws attention to the production of disadvantage through the active dynamics of social interaction, rather than through anonymous processes of impoverishment and marginalisation' (Kabeer 2000, 84). Second, the social exclusion lens grasps the importance of misrecognition and group-based discrimination and disadvantages and affirms 'the significance of 'representation' for individuals and groups…through cultural activities, social and political participation, and community respect' (Wisor 2012, 118). As such, this may help us to understand the centrality of political demands for recognition, respect, and inclusion by pro-poor organizations and movements. Third, 'the social exclusion necessarily focuses on the *contexts* in which deprivation occur. Individuals are thus not understood as unembedded units of production…[or]consumption, but as highly embedded in social and political environments that are deeply interrelated with the deprivations they face' (119). Poor-led social movements and groups in low and middle-income countries usually aim to transform the specific social and political context in which their poverty arises by targeting national social policies and structures of injustice, as I shall argue shortly. Finally, Wisor notes that 'the social exclusion approach is explicitly political,' allowing us to see 'the political processes by which people become and are kept poor' (119). In their struggles and organizations, poor communities have understood this connection between social-political processes of exclusion and material poverty much better than have philosophers writing about global poverty.

To better understand why relative deprivations can and do translate not only into poverty but also powerlessness, it is also helpful to look to Iris Young's discussion of social-structural inequalities and injustices (Young 2011). These inequalities, and the vulnerabilities to which they give rise, are not readily grasped from within a distributive justice framework, in part because the latter overemphasizes resources and reduces poverty to a matter of material scarcity. Sufficiency thinking, as we saw, dismisses the significance of inequalities that shape people's access to the opportunities and goods they need for well-being, and also fails to see that such inequalities are in a very real sense constitutive of the experience of poverty. Young's account of one woman's (Sandy's) structural vulnerability to homelessness highlights the ways in which multiple institutions and social rules prevent her from finding decent housing, without any one factor being dispositive in her homelessness (Young 2011). The structural vulnerability to poverty and homelessness that Young describes is bound up with institutions and rules that accord greater power and opportunities to some rather than others. Her account of social-structural injustice helps to explain

why poor-led social movements and organizations focus so much on empowering poor communities, and on challenging the corruption and lack of transparency and accountability that contribute to their powerlessness. The remedy for this vulnerability is not simply more resources (although these of course help); rather, it is collective action (Young 2011; Chandhoke 2013).

'Recognition theorists' propose an understanding of poverty that complements Young's emphasis on vulnerability and structural injustice, as well as the social exclusion approach to poverty. Recognition theory similarly emphasizes aspects routinely overlooked by resource-focused approaches – specifically, those of disrespect, humiliation, shame, and lack of recognition (Schweiger 2014). These experiences, recognition theorists argue, are typically part of the processes of social exclusion that many social scientists and anti-poverty advocates now say best capture the reality of poverty. The recognition approach to poverty is therefore able to capture a number of the subjectively-felt aspects of poverty that are not well captured by standard poverty measures – much like Young's analysis of the structural injustices that many people *experience as* entrenched barriers to their ability to live a life of self-respect:

> Misrecognition, as well as recognition, is an umbrella term, and neither focuses on a single feature of human life in the way that much poverty research does in its focus on money and material assets. Recognition theory, rather, argues that injustices such as poverty have to be understood in their multidimensionality….It focuses on the increased vulnerability of poor people to forms of misrecognition and on how poverty disrupts families, communities, and other relations of care and love, and how it affects the self and identity of the poor (Schweiger 2014, 269).

While recognition theorists aim to bring the (often overlooked) subjective and relational experiences of poverty to our attention, they by no means ignore the more standard measures of deprivation. Rather, they see these experiences as inextricably bound up with – and shaped by – material and social disadvantages along many dimensions (Graf and Schweiger 2013, 2014).

As with both Young's analysis of structural injustice and vulnerability and the social exclusion view, then, the recognition view of poverty is deeply concerned with the stigmatizing, exclusionary, and disempowering effects of deprivation and inequality. As a first step towards reversing these harms, all three approaches ask us to notice and hear what poor individuals *themselves* say about their experience of poverty. The subjectively felt and relational aspects of disadvantage and scarcity simply cannot be well understood in the absence of this first-hand knowledge; while some conventional poverty measurements can gauge the extent of a person's (or group's) social exclusion, they cannot readily convey the interior experience of disrespect, shame, or humiliation to which conditions of social and material deprivation give rise. Moreover, many of the material and social-relational aspects of poverty are deeply contextual – that is, sensitive to the particular structures, norms, and expectations of particular societies; as a result, we cannot know fully or precisely what set of factors or conditions makes a person (or a group) vulnerable to disrespect, shame, or to a sense of powerlessness without hearing their perspectives (Graf and Schweiger 2013). Poverty activists in advanced industrialized states have

long protested governments' failure to recognize and include the poor in planning and implementing anti-poverty initiatives, arguing that it signals a lack of respect for the poor and their first-hand knowledge (Lister 2013). In the context of developing countries, development aid programs that fail to include the perspectives of the poor, or to include them as active participants in poverty solutions, have been the subject of extensive criticism and backlash. Non-inclusive development interventions may in some sense reinforce the exclusion and status-subordination of the poor in developing states because it 'often fails in treating its target population as equivalent partners and valid agents of knowledge production. The rhetoric of partnership is undermined by the practices of strongly asymmetric power relations' (Dügben 2012, 74–75).

In addition to encouraging us to include the perspectives and insights of the poor themselves, the alternative, relational approaches to poverty discussed here also show us why collective action by poor communities must become a critical component of poverty alleviation. Disrespect, lack of recognition, shame, and humiliation, are not readily redressed by top-down solutions to deprivation that treat the poor as passive recipients. To truly reverse the social exclusion and sense of powerlessness that both chronic and acute poverty engender, the poor must come to feel that they have a say in demanding and directing the changes that they need. This is true not only for symbolic reasons of the sort that Frantz Fanon (1968) wrote about – that is, the need to throw off the colonial legacy of cultural domination and disrespect in order to clear the way for an emancipated consciousness and identity to emerge. Rather, it is also because recognizing and validating the political agency of poor individuals is critical to acknowledging their equal status as fellow citizens (in the national context) and treating them as persons with human rights (in the global context), including rights of democratic participation. As Lister notes, the view that participation by the poor is important 'acknowledges the agency of rights-bearers and their potential to play a role in the development of rights and services. In strengthening that agency it enables people with experience of poverty to act more effectively as democratic citizens and bearers of human rights' (2013, 118).

It is no coincidence that poor-led organizations and movements of the poor (in both the global South as well as the North) increasingly frame their struggles in the language of human rights, particularly social and economic human rights. This framing certainly intersects well with domestic social policy, which poor activists are most often seeking to change. But more importantly, by demanding that their human rights be respected, poor activists are in a sense interpellated as political agents. As Neera Chandhoke explains, in reaching for human rights, 'the global poor are not seen as victims who have to be given cash transfers because the West is guilty but instead are treated as rights-bearers and thus people who possess irreducible moral status' (Chandhoke 2010, 80). The very act of claiming rights and articulating social policy draws attention to the interests of the poor as a concrete political entity within a society; these entities can have a surprisingly strong degree of influence when they form regional or national coalitions and/or transnational networks (Sandbrook 2002). Poverty alleviation strategies or initiatives that recognize and validate the collective actions of poor organizations (or movements) can also

arguably bolster disadvantaged communities' sense of political inclusion: 'political mobilization…makes people conscious of what is due to them, and what they have been denied…this is what these networks of solidarity accomplish' (Chandhoke 2010, 80). While there is of course a risk that the language of poor empowerment, citizenship, and social rights can be co-opted by the neoliberal agenda of 'inclusive liberalism,' there is no shortage of examples of genuinely radical poor-based social movements that use these framings, particularly in Latin America and South Africa (Hickey 2010).

Poor-led social movements and organizations are inherently political insofar as they seek to mobilize poor communities in order to exert pressure on local and/or national governments to introduce social policies or other reforms that will make the lives of the poor better. At the local level especially, it is instructive that many such poor-led groups specifically target structures of bureaucratic control and corruption that hamper the poor in their efforts to survive, and therefore seek explicitly to empower them. Policy-oriented poor social movements in particular are thus best seen as 'forms of political action that attack the social relationships underlying chronic poverty' (Bebbington 2007, 798) whose aim is to make relevant agents reform the policies (or policy vacuums) that reinforce their poverty. Nor is this connection between collective action and empowerment limited to developing countries, as there is by now a wealth of research on participatory anti-poverty initiatives that supports the connection between participation and empowerment among the poor in industrialized states. The transformative possibilities of poor-led organizations and social movements in the developing world is however my focus here, as their omission from normative discussions of global poverty has been accompanied by a general disregard for the poor as actual or potential agents of social change (Deveaux 2015). In the next section, I discuss the SDI in order to illuminate some of the surprising foci, strategies, and accomplishments of this global network, and to show why the insights and contributions of this and similar poor-led movements (and organizations) to poverty alleviation is distinctive and critical to the theory and practice of global justice.

13.4 What Theorists Can Learn from Poverty Activists: Slum Dwellers International

SDI is an international network of grassroots, community-based organizations of the urban poor, chiefly homeless and landless residents. Launched in 1996 and founded by Mumbai grassroots leader Jockin Arputham, it evolved from the work and alliance of three groups in India: the Mumbai-based SPARC (focused on pavement dwellers) and *Mahila Milan* ('Women Together,' empowering women residents of slums and pavements); and the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), founded in 1974. With chapters and partners in 33 countries, the SDI is by far the largest network of urban poor residents and their advocates in the world. In a

nutshell, 'SDI groups seek to identify a political space and then use this space to secure developmental benefits, generally around secure tenure, infrastructure, services and housing, that address immediate needs and build the capacity of the poor to innovate, strategise and negotiate for further benefits' (d'Cruz and Mitlin 2007, 235). My purpose here is to sketch out some of the key aims and organizing strategies of SDI and its affiliates, in order to make the case that pro-poor politics holds important insights for normative theorizing about poverty.

From its inception, the SDI has been committed to community-directed change: 'SDI affiliates support people-centred development, with organized communities leading and implementing activities to secure a pro-poor urban transformation recognized and resourced by the state' (Mitlin 2013, 484). The participatory and grassroots orientation of SDI is an extension of the beliefs and organizing style of the three Indian groups whose alliance paved the way for the transnational network. As Arjun Appadurai (2002, 28) explains,

> The Alliance has evolved a style of pro-poor activism that consciously departs from earlier models of social work, welfarism, and community organization….Instead of relying on the model of an outside organizer who teaches local communities how to hold the state to its normative obligations to the poor, the Alliance is committed to the methods of organization, mobilization, teaching, and learning that build on what poor persons already know and understand. The first principle of this approach is that no one knows more about how to survive poverty than the poor themselves.

As this description suggests, SDI and its national affiliates are at the vanguard of what has come to be known as 'pro-poor' political organizing and change; indeed, the organization's mission statement says that 'SDI believes that the only way to manage urban growth and to create inclusive cities is for the urban poor to be at the center of strategies for urban development' (SDI website, 2015). What does this mean, in practice? First, SDI and the national federations that it comprises are actually led by urban poor representatives who are activists in slums or among pavement dwellers. As one observer notes, 'the NGOs that support each federation…have redefined the role of professionals away from being the talkers, managers and solution generators to being listeners and supporters of community-generated solutions' (Satterthwaite 2001, 136).

Second and relatedly, SDI focuses on facilitating knowledge exchanges between the different national federations of slum dwellers, aimed at building up the organizing capabilities and political strategies of urban poor groups and their social movements. From its inception, it has sponsored face-to-face meetings of delegations of national slum dweller federations who travel to meet their counterparts in other countries. Typically the visits 'involve immediate immersion in the ongoing projects of the host community' (Appadurai 2002, 41). Beyond sharing experiences and tactics for supporting and protecting slum communities, these exchanges have made possible the 'building of deep democracies locally' (Appadurai 2002, 42). This is not only because of the examples of grassroots organizing that SDI activists are exposed to, but because of the network's commitment to democratic internal criticism and debate: 'When members of the SDI meet in one another's localities (as well as on other occasions, such as meetings in London, New York, or the Hague),

they have the occasion to raise hard questions about inclusion, power, hierarchy, and political risk or naïveté in their host's local and regional organizations' (Appadurai 2002, 43). At the same time, these visits between the national federations have garnered considerable media attention and even funding from important bodies (both governmental and non-governmental), thereby increasing the political clout of the national federations and their affiliates (Appadurai 2002, 42). In addition to improving the federations' bargaining power with local and national governments, the heightened profile of the global SDI exchanges has made it possible for the organization to move into 'more long-term strategic plans for funding, capacity building, and what they call scaling up' (Appadurai 2002, 42).

The political knowledge and strategies that the representatives and members of the member federations of SDI share with one another is intended to build up the political capacities of these federations and their member groups through tactical information and solidarity. But what, concretely, are these political capacities in turn directed at achieving for slum-dwellers? Many of the national slum and pavement dweller federations (and their member groups) provide concrete support to communities of urban poor who are fighting evictions from informal settlements, including legal and tactical support against shack demolition – or in some cases, to minimize the destruction of personal possessions through voluntary dismantling. Saving and credit schemes to assist slum and pavement dwellers have also quickly emerged as a central part of the work of member groups of the national federations. In India, *Mahila Milan* was founded to link together hundreds of women's collectives which help women pavement and slum dwellers to create income and savings so as to better weather the various crises that punctuate their precarious living situations (Patel and Mitlin 2004, 219). The Indian Alliance has helped to extend this group's success, and by 2011, the savings network consisted over 750,000 savers in 65 cities in the country (Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014, 140). *Mahila Milan*, like many other members of the national federations within SDI, is active in other areas of empowerment, teaching slum dwellers how to do community-based enumerations as well as to construct housing (Patel and Mitlin 2004). Indeed, enumeration of slum and pavement dwellers has been a longstanding cornerstone of the work of SDI members, because it throws light on the paucity of services and infrastructure for these dwellers as well as providing proof of the (undercounted) vast number of residents of informal settlements:

> Enumeration is a simple but powerful tool designed by the residents of informal settlements, who own and use the information that they gather themselves. Through enumerations they survey and map themselves, and build the skills and knowledge to represent themselves and their needs to government…They develop a critical collective identity that helps form the political basis for their engagement with government. For these reasons, the motto within SDI is 'When in doubt, count!' (Patel et al. 2012, 14)

SDI's federations and their member groups also advocate for the provision of badly needed social services to slums, such as sanitation facilities. Drawing attention to the political obstacles to these municipal services has also been an important part of the strategy of some of the federations and their member groups. The Indian Alliance publicized the fact that the budget allocated to the construction of public toilets by

the Mumbai Municipality went unused, revealing that the problem lay in the 'city's patronage-based politics…[and the ad-hoc] way in which the city dealt with the sanitation needs of the vast majority of the city's residents' (Menon 2013, 164). The Alliance's revelation of this fact and its outspoken criticism of the few (poorly designed and maintained) public toilets that were supplied was soon followed up with their own grassroots initiative to design, construct, and maintain what they called a 'community toilet' – with the support of the local municipality. Within the Alliance, the women's group *Mahila Milan* took the lead in assessing the different needs of children, men and women in slum communities, designing neighborhood toilet blocks that were subsequently replicated across Mumbai (Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014). Drawing on her ethnographic research on Mumbai's informal settlements, Gayatri Menon explains the significance of this project in empowering its residents and altering the state's engagement with them:

> Less an architectural model and more an ethico-political innovation that seeks to transform the way in which the state invests in and engages with the urban poor, the community toilet seeks to expand the decision-making power of the subjects of social policy. The public toilet as conceived by the Municipality relegates the poor to the position of welfare recipients…. The community toilet on the other hand, calls forth a substantive, and insurgent understanding of citizenship that empowers impoverished communities by creating the conditions for them to exercise a degree of local, democratic control over the conditions of their living, that is, to recover agency. (Menon 2013, 165)

While my discussion has focused on the Indian organizations within SDI, the goals and strategies of other national federations and their members very much echo those discussed here. In Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Brazil, Cambodia, and the Philippines, for example, the SDI and its affiliates have secured housing plots and subsidies, spearheaded community-led slum upgrading projects, helped to build up the resources of slums through community-managed savings practices, and developed (and delivered) innovative, alternative public sanitation facilities. They have earned the support of local and national governments with their large, low-income community housing construction projects, housing subsidy plans, and savings schemes (Bolnick 2008; d'Cruz and Mitlin 2007). Sometimes SDI's national federations work with select NGOs and draw on their professional expertise, but importantly, these are genuine (as well as strategic and often temporary) partnerships, and not driven by the interests or agendas of NGO professionals. Importantly, however, the latter are kept at arm's length from the core policy-setting process within SDI organizations, and are 'held to account through a community-led governance process' that 'treats professionals as an executive, there to enact the wishes of democratic representatives of the community' (Mitlin 2013, 494). Despite its successes with government in some places and its endorsement (at times) by powerful entities like the World Bank, the SDI has not wavered in its commitment to poor-directed change, as is evidenced in its ongoing efforts to train local leaders (particularly women), create community knowledge, and expand the capabilities of its ever-growing membership base (d'Cruz and Mitlin 2007; Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014).

As this analysis suggests, the success of SDI and its affiliates must be measured not only by the housing that it has managed to supply or generate for slum and pavement dwellers, which is certainly considerable – between 15,000 and 30,000 housing units annually in the last several years (Bolnick 2008). Rather, it must also be measured in terms of the political shifts that it has effected, or at least begun to effect. One of these shifts has to do with the consciousness and capabilities of slum and pavement dwellers themselves, in places where SDI and its members have been active. By becoming directly involved in the multi-tiered process of bringing housing and services to their communities – from enumerating neighbors and assessing communal needs to designing facilities and working with local and national government officials for this infrastructure – the disempowered urban poor become political agents. Where it has worked well, the SDI's model of grassroots organizing has thus not only challenged the marginality of pavement dwellers, but created a new 'subject of public policy' modeled on a kind of insurgent citizenship (Menon 2013, 158). These political subjects do not work in isolation; rather, SDI aims to create 'poor communities able to engage in partnerships with more powerful agencies… [in such a way as to increase] the capability of these communities to perform more powerfully as instruments of deep democracy in the local context' (Appadurai 2002, 46). Building the knowledge and capacities of poor communities not only gives members a sense of agency, but it makes it possible for them to press their demands for needed reforms much more effectively; after all, 'the main focus of the members of Shack/Slum Dwellers International is not on donor-funded projects but on changing government institutions and policies within each locality and nationally so that they respond to the needs and priorities of urban poor groups' (Satterthwaite 2001, 138). Through their SDI activism, the urban poor demand the accountability of government agencies, to be sure, but on terms very different from those of traditional welfarism or even development: 'SDI groups are involved in developing new relationships between the urban poor and the city authorities and politicians' (d'Cruz and Mitlin 2007, 234). These relationships, and indeed a new kind of politics, are made possible by the interventions and openings that SDI and member organizations create through their community activism, institutional and political capacity-building, and pro-poor solidarity work.

13.5 What Poor-Led Political Struggles Can Teach Us About Poverty

SDI's efforts to transform the powerlessness of poor communities by fostering slum dwellers' 'agency as a fundamental aspect of their demand for a fairer distribution of public goods and claims to a right to the city' (Menon 2013, 157) pushes against a *merely* redistributive understanding of global justice. SDI and its federations have arguably developed a political model for poverty alleviation that supports the 'agency and collective capacity' of the urban poor (Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014,

133) far better than state-sponsored or even I/NGO-led anti-poverty initiatives do. Yet the priorities and strategies of this and other poor-led organizations are conspicuously absent from mainstream poverty-reduction approaches in philosophy, notably those of Peter Singer (2010) and Thomas Pogge (2008). This serious omission has had the ironic effect of marginalizing poor communities within global justice discourse—in effect, obscuring the poor's own analyses and insights regarding poverty, as well as their concrete efforts to transform the structures that perpetuate it. Relational accounts of chronic poverty, such as those emphasizing social exclusion and misrecognition, are better able to acknowledge the significance of poor communities' contributions to poverty analysis and alleviation.

The work of poor-led social movements and political organizations contains valuable normative insights for ethical and political approaches to reducing poverty and inequality – insights that philosophers would do well to heed. Importantly, the priorities and strategies of poor communities sometimes depart from normative theorist's usual assumptions about what those living in poverty most want and need, thus leading us to reconsider these assumptions. For example, it is striking that the redistribution of goods and resources is rarely the sole (or even primary) goal of poor-led organizations' and movements' politics. Instead, pro-poor political struggles aim first and foremost to transform the social and political structures that systematically disempower poor citizens. In Young's terms, they take aim at the structural injustices to which they are subjected, and which produce what Charles Tilly refers to as 'durable inequalities' – persistent inequalities often transmitted across generations. These structural injustices cannot be undone by shifting resources alone – if indeed such a thing were possible without a seismic shift in power. Neither the redistributive paradigm in general, nor 'sufficiency' thinking in particular, then, grasp the importance of politically transforming processes and structures of social inequality. By contrast, a relational account of poverty sees the transformation of unjust structures and relations of power inequality as critical to reducing deprivation.

Poor-led political movements and organizing also reveal important sources of discrimination, disadvantage, and exclusion that perpetuate poverty – and which blind-side many resourcist poverty reduction initiatives. The existence of these structures – which deepen the poverty of certain subgroups of the poor, like women and ethnic/racial/religious minorities – helps explain why poor organizations target oppressive social and political structures and relations in their struggles to reduce poverty. Concurrently, pro-poor groups often target the empowerment of these doubly disadvantaged groups in their organizations. Early on, the NSDF identified women's particular disadvantages as key to understanding the entrenched vulnerability of slum and pavement dwellers, and women's leadership as a crucial part of any struggle to reduce urban poverty. These were the reasons for establishing *Mahila Milan*:

> With most savers and savings-groups managers being women, these savings groups help address the multiple forms of disadvantage, oppression and exploitation that they face…. This challenges and helps overturn discrimination and limited social expectations as women engage with each other as activists (rather than remaining subservient to male and/or older household members), public agents (rather than enclosed in the household) and strategic thinkers (rather than passive)....As women take up new leadership roles in providing essential goods and services centred on the home and neighbourhood, an engagement with the state begins. (Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014, 162)

Understanding the vulnerability to poverty of certain groups (like women) arguably requires a fine-grained analysis of social relations, family dynamics, norms, and local political institutions and structures – as capability approach proponents have argued (Sen 1999). But equally, reducing this vulnerability requires that those suffering disadvantage, discrimination and exclusion be at the center of processes that seek to dismantle structures of inequality.

Pro-poor organizations and movements thus care very much about enhancing the capabilities and political voice of poor communities – a priority overlooked by broadly redistributive approaches to poverty reduction. This is partly so that they can be more effective at holding relevant agents (usually government) accountable for failing to deliver social goods to which they, as citizens, are entitled. But equally, the capacity-building focus of poor-led groups also has to do with transforming deprived individuals' powerlessness and sense of exclusion into one of empowerment and inclusion. As Green (2008, 20) writes, 'such an assertion of power is both an end in itself – a crucial kind of freedom – and a means to ensure that the different institutions of society (the state, the market, the community, and the family) respect people's rights and meet their needs, via laws, rules, policies, and day-to-day-practices'. In seeking to develop the social and political capabilities of the poor, activists often hold out a new model of citizenship, like the insurgent, activist citizenship of the urban poor in the case of SDI, or 'agrarian citizenship' in the case of the Brazil's agrarian land movement, MST (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*) (Wittman 2010). Human rights claims (especially social and economic rights) are increasingly part of these alternative, radical models of citizenship.

Whether they appeal to their social rights as citizens or invoke the language of human rights (or both), poor communities aim through their activism and organizing to challenge and transform their powerlessness in the face of local, national, and global institutions. This may strike us as wishful thinking or a fantastical, modern-day David and Goliath fable. But if we view poverty in relational terms (Mosse 2010), as was suggested earlier, it becomes clear that some of its central harms – humiliation, shame, disrespect, voicelessness, lack of recognition – require remedies that specifically target the social exclusion and disempowerment of the poor. Pro-poor social movements and organizations understand this, and are motivated by the belief that freedom from poverty (like exploitation and domination) is not something that can be achieved passively in the sense of being granted to the poor. Rather, they proceed on the assumption that a lasting reduction of poverty and the achievement of 'durable empowerment' (Drydyk 2008) demands a process of social and political struggle in which unjust power structures and relationships are identified, challenged, and transformed by citizens. Not only do these groups and movements demand accountability, transparency, and reform, then, but they assert their own nascent agency by developing alternative visions and proposals for development and poverty alleviation, as the example of SDI showed. These two aspects – transforming unjust structures that disempower poor and marginalized citizens, and enhancing the creative political capabilities of citizens – are essential, and closely linked (Drydyk 2013). Importantly, such empowerment efforts must be attentive to

relational inequalities that produce vulnerability to poverty, particularly to 'group subjection and intra-group dominance' (Drydyk 2013, 260).

The scope and aims of poor social movements and organizations differ from redistribution-focused approaches to poverty in an another respect: while the former very often focus on activism at the local, regional and national levels, the latter target the transnational level (with the exception of capability theorists like Martha Nussbaum). There are of course many good reasons why philosophers concerned with acute poverty and inequality would choose to focus their attention on global processes and institutions – not least, their sheer power and scope. But given the importance of local and national institutions, structures, and social policies for the daily lives and capabilities of the poor, it is critical that normative theorizing does not ignore these entities, or activism directed at them. Although global coalitions can and do enhance the solidarity of the disenfranchised, arguably 'the main agent that can realize rights and thus justice remains the national, democratic state upon which demands can be made, and from which accountability can be demanded' (Chandhoke 2013, 312). The injustices that poor communities care most about are often sedimented by processes and structures at these sub-global levels; as a result, poor politics often target lack of accountability, lack of transparency, and the corruption of government and NGOs (McGee and Gaventa 2010). While some theorists have drawn attention to the lack of accountability of global financial institutions, they have paid little attention to issues of transparency, accountability, and corruption at more proximate levels. And yet, as Gillian Brock has noted,

> Corruption plays a huge role in sustaining high levels of poverty, undermining beneficial development and undermining many countries' ability to enjoy reasonable opportunities for development….There is an underappreciated connection between corruption and people being unable to meet their basic needs (2014, 256).

Equally important, pro-poor activists target local, regional, and national level processes and policies because it is at these levels that they can most readily transform their own sense of disempowerment. The urban poor mobilized through SDI's federations and their member groups are actively involved not only in protesting unjust policies and practices at these sub-global levels, but in developing and implementing alterative solutions to their lack of housing and social services. As we saw, this often takes place through partnerships with (or support from) local and sometimes regional and national governments. In Brazil, for example, SDI partnered with both private sector entities and a support NGO (*Interaçao*) to secure legal land tenure for 7000 families in the space of 3 years (Bolnick 2008). Contributing in these ways, and building social and political capabilities more generally, is not as easy in activism that targets global structures, as significant as these are to poverty. Rather, 'everyday struggles for livelihood take place in particular localities or 'communities' whose vitality is a function of the density and depth of their civil associations, especially among the poor' (Friedmann 1996, 170). If poverty is a relational process in which multiple, cross-cutting structural inequalities are sustained, then empowerment initiatives must make it possible for people to take aim at these relational structures at close range (Cornwall and Rivas 2015).

Finally, by paying closer attention to the social movements and organizations of the urban and rural poor, philosophers will acknowledge their status as moral and political agents of justice. Too often the poor have been overlooked as possible agents in poverty reduction; arguably, our 'analyses need to consider the full range of different agents who might be able to play a part in reducing global injustice' (Brock 2014, 258). Skeptics who are unconvinced that poor activism can amount to much may not be persuaded by descriptions of poor-led politics; they might, however, be moved by appeals to democratic justice. Justice conceived according to principles of democratic legitimacy demands that those directly affected both by poverty and by attempts to alleviate it have a central role (should they wish to take it up) in articulating and developing responses to poverty. Nancy Fraser's idea of the 'all-subjected' principle — an expanded and amended version of the all-affected principle — is helpful here in explaining why 'parity of participation' (Fraser 2008; Fraser 2010) should be understood as a core requirement of global justice by democratic theorists. To the extent that normative theorizing about poverty ignores or fails to include poor citizens, it reinforces their exclusion from political power. While philosophers cannot transform the poor's lack of power and voice, by incorporating their communities' and social movements' insights into our normative theories of poverty reduction (and of global justice generally), we can help to recognize and validate their voices. Beyond demonstrating solidarity, such a move would make ethical approaches to poverty more relevant to the relational realities of poverty that poor activists have long understood – and more consistent with the radical democratic principles that theorists of global justice usually espouse.

I have argued that political philosophers writing on global poverty need to take seriously the social and political organizations and movements of the poor. This does not mean that they should not also engage the question of what duties rich states owe to the poor; nor have I denied that that global redistribution on a massive scale is required in order to eradicate poverty or achieve global justice. Rather, my aim has been to show that the value of theorists' usual conversations about global poverty is greatly reduced if it ignores the priorities and perspectives of existing poor organizations and struggles. We need our normative discussions of poverty alleviation to intersect and resonate much more closely with poor-led politics if such theorizing is to be of use in framing and challenging the vast power inequalities and injustices that make acute poverty possible.

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