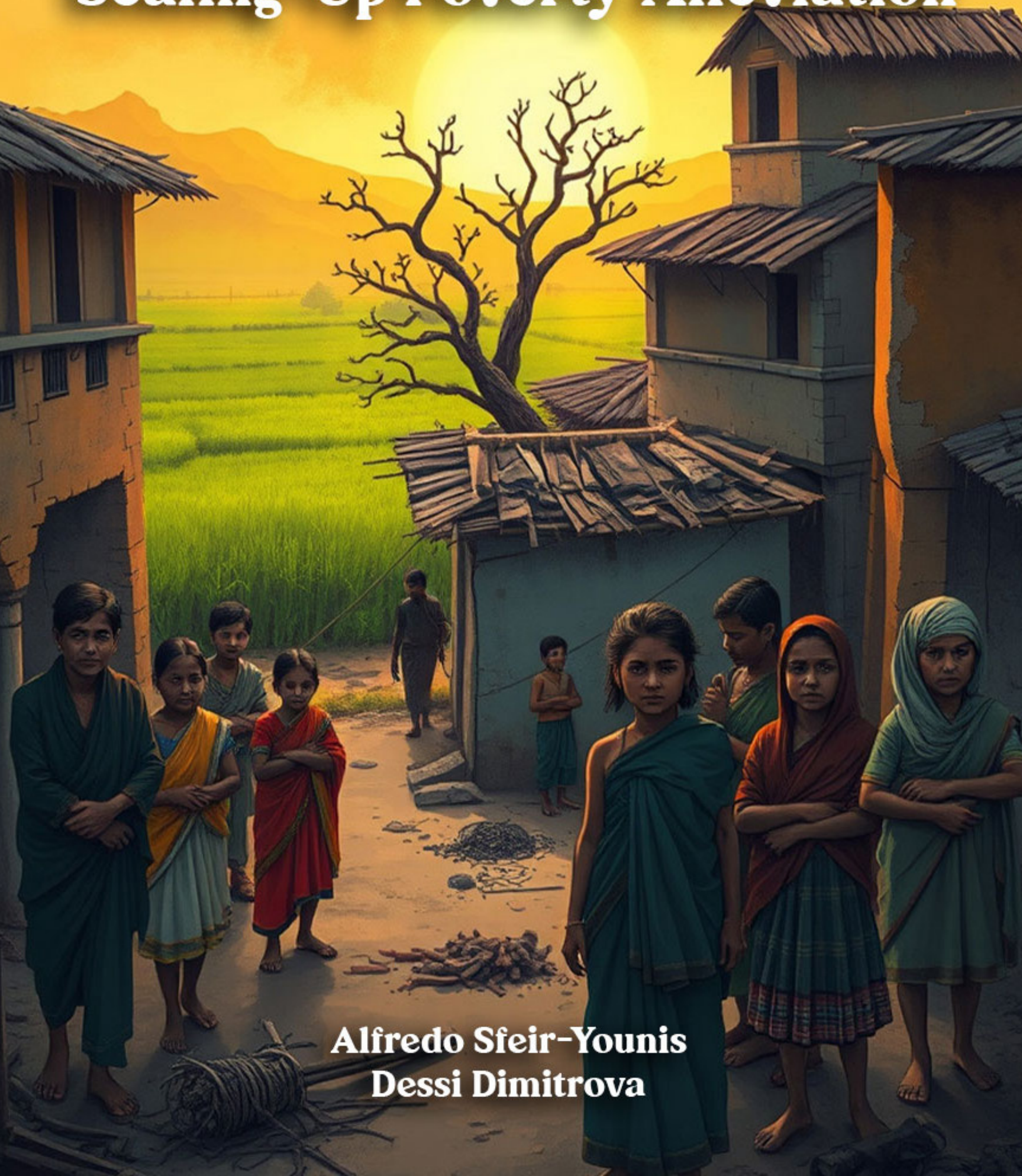


The Role of Human Rights In Scaling-Up Poverty Alleviation

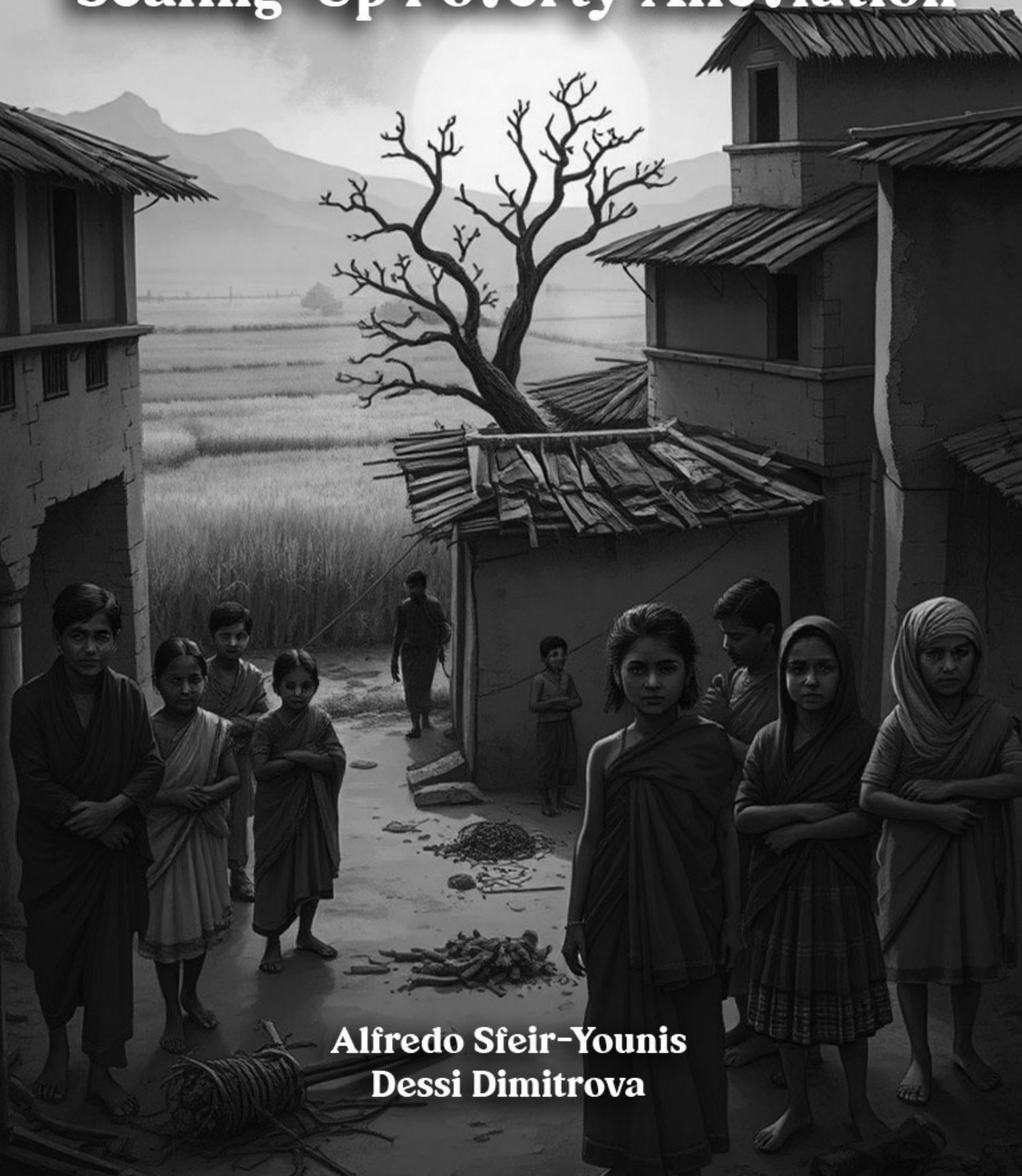


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The Role of Human Rights In Scaling-Up Poverty Alleviation



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General Considerations: At A Glance¹

Scaling up poverty alleviation programs is a complex and multi-dimensional process. Several variables determine the quality and extent of scaling up, but little has been said about the role of human rights and other normative dimensions of development. Within this context, this paper explores the importance of human rights in scaling-up poverty alleviation. The information and data presented here come from a review of 51 country-based case studies². Although none of the cases were designed having in mind human rights (as per terms of references), they do contain rich and diverse materials from various sectors of the economy and from country-wide poverty strategies.

Two contingent concerns were important in carrying out this study: (a) whether these case studies have addressed the issues of human rights (e.g., to know if there was sufficient attention paid to human rights and how this attention was expressed --intent and coverage). (b) what net contributions may human rights bring to the understanding of 'success' (satisfactory performance) or 'failure' (unsatisfactory performance) in scaling-up (e.g., establishing true cause-effects relationships and creating a framework to address human rights and poverty).

We know of very few empirical studies linking human rights with poverty alleviation. Notable exceptions are studies which address the two issues in a taxonomic way –i.e., thematic mapping in relation to coverage and possible joint outcomes. These taxonomic studies have shed some light on the possible methodological differences between the human rights based approach to poverty alleviation (HRBAP) and the human needs based approach to poverty (HNBAP), traditionally

¹ This paper has been prepared by Alfredo Sfeir-Younis and Dessi Dimitrova, The World Bank. The views expressed here are solely of the authors and should not be attributed to the World Bank or any of its affiliates. Errors and omissions are also of the authors.

² This is a good sample of case studies that were prepared within the context of the World Bank's sponsored conference, on scaling up poverty, that took place in Shanghai, China.

advocated by most economists today.

The traditional approach has not provided the foundation for a firm consideration of human rights in poverty alleviation. This is to say, whether poverty alleviation programs will, in the end, fulfill human rights, or whether existing human rights violations are the main cause of poverty. A central issue in our public debate today.

During the last few years, several economists have argued that alleviating poverty is tantamount to the realization of all human rights. This is equivalent to saying that implementation of poverty alleviation programs is a sufficient condition to the realization of human rights. While there is some truth in this proposition --as many who live in poverty have not fulfilled their human rights and have seen many of their human rights violated. Some argue that living in absolute poverty is a violation of human rights.

A corollary of the above proposition in traditional economic thinking is that human rights are neither the point of departure for economic and social policies nor for poverty alleviation programs. Rather, human rights are seen as a residual (e.g., they will be realized as a result of the poverty programs). Therefore, the coherent policy advice which naturally follows is that societies should go for poverty alleviation first. The expectation is that societies will, in the end, resolve the issues of rights as a residual of poverty alleviation policies and programs.

While it may be possible to find win-win situations, this relationship of causality is too simplistic, and it does not necessarily create the sufficient conditions needed for the realization of rights. There is a lot more to be done if human rights are to be realized.

In addition, such a line of argument puts poverty reduction strategies in

serious political jeopardy, as they will be judged poorly from the human rights angle, when civil society sees little success in the fulfillment of rights.

The findings of this paper suggest the need for a shift in the direction of causality in the above mentioned argument and to bring to the attention of policy maker the sort of sufficient conditions needed to fulfill those rights.

In this process, economics and finance are central to the realization of all human rights. In particular, the operational definition of many rights is conditioned to specific forms of human betterment (e.g., a healthier population) and higher levels of welfare (e.g., having access to foods). These higher levels of welfare result, among other things, from the accumulation of several forms of capital; e.g., physical, financial, human, natural, institutional, and cultural.

It is not possible to conceive human rights as “things” one has to enforce or comply with. Notwithstanding the importance of law enforcement and mechanisms for the restitution of legal obligations. Nobody negates the importance of existing legal considerations and obligations. However, human rights must also be understood as a key dimension of economic and social development. For example, the right of women to land is not an abstract legal concept to be enforced, but a development and social practice intimately linked to the expansion and development of different forms of capital participating in economic development (e.g., access to financing, equal institutional arrangements).

Today, civil society greatly question seeing human rights just as a residual of poverty alleviation programs. For them, this is a way to justify a strategy of “business as usual”: to do nothing towards the

solution of complex and controversial issues.

The review of the 51 case studies shows that traditional poverty alleviation programs only partially address Civil and Political Rights (CPR), and of Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ESCR). This seems to be the result of attention paid mainly to definitions of poverty based on income poverty or material-needs poverty. These hide many situations and processes leading into poverty or that get people out of poverty.

Development experience demonstrates that many aspects of poverty cannot be defined, or valued, just in material terms. Thus, focusing on human rights as a policy priority will create an opportunity to address such issues as responsibility of actors, empowerment of voiceless people, roles and functions of different stakeholders, accountability of development outcomes for low income beneficiaries, participation of minorities, equality across the board, non-discrimination, etc.; all important dimensions of poverty.

A digression. This is not the first time development specialist have to revise the abovementioned-type and popularly accepted cause-effect relationships. During the seventies and early eighties, most policy makers promoted a development strategy that paid attention first to growth and, only later to environmental conservation (i.e., this was known as “to grow now and clean later strategy”). The arguments were simple and powerful (e.g., the need for growth to clean the environment). While an economy needs to accumulate capital (i.e., grow first) in order to generate the necessary surpluses to clean later, or to implement conservation and management programs later, taking the arguments to the limits made the strategy quite simplistic. The causality was there to make sustainable development a residual of economic efficiency decisions. As a result, we see how economic development creates major negative externalities (i.e., water and air pollution) that, in turn, become the “business” of development

afterwards (e.g., the financing pollution abatement programs).

Unfortunately, not many win-win situations are available to decision makers. And, when they are, these win-win situations are not easily attainable. At least two reasons account for this: First, because of the complex spatial (e.g., the spread of environmental effects over large spaces) and inter-temporal (e.g., the need to make decisions whose impacts are only seen in the very long term) trade-offs involved in the access, management and controls of a society's natural capital, in comparison to attaining economic efficient outcomes locally. Second, because there are strong institutional asymmetries –or major disparities in institutional capacities and frameworks—in relation to economic efficiency decisions and those that are geared to long-term sustainability. These asymmetries create new forms of institutional externalities; e.g., trade liberalization of forest products –something that can be done just in a few days-- without accompanying the policy with the need to settling/allocate property rights appropriately over the forest and, thus, avoid the tragedy of the commons. Assigning property rights over existing forests may take many years.

These two reasons we have used here to illustrate an institutional experience in relation to ecology and the environment also apply to the relationship between human rights and poverty alleviation. Just to address poverty is indeed a business as usual approach, as human rights will then be realized (if ever) in random and uncertain manners.

To fully understand the synergies between human rights and economic development demands a different set of development lenses and principles, and requires a special approach to institutional arrangements, capacity building, and policy design.

One of this paper's main conclusion is that the causality in the analysis of poverty and human rights must be reversed: it is the violation of human rights is a major cause of poverty. Violation of human rights have become a major source of social exclusion, for example, through the lack of voice and meaningful participation. These weakens significantly people's human and social identities, entering by force into a process of progressive disempowerment. Not having a voice in poverty alleviation programs, for example, it implies leaving a large number of people outside the scope of development. This is particularly the case of women, the disabled, and ethnic minorities.

In many ways, the constant violations of human rights will put many countries in a position of never being able to attain key social and economic development goals (like the MDGs).

Before addressing methodological issues, herewith some of the most important conclusions:

First, the explicit treatment by the case studies of human rights in the language of human rights is less than satisfactory.

The cases were neither designed with the view to capture the issues of human rights nor do they assess their possible impacts in scaling-up poverty alleviation. There are some that address issues of human rights using the language of economic development. A very small group addresses human rights through the identification of the possible outcomes of scaling-up (i.e., to fulfill human rights).

Second, the understanding of scaling-up poverty alleviation varies significantly from case study to case study.

The notion of what actually constitutes scaling-up (in the sense of being revealed by the authors of the cases), and the determinants of success in scaling up, are not uniform across the cases reviewed. This is due to the differences in understanding the terms of references, which in turn, provided a fertile and diverse ground to apply a number of concepts and methods to distill and come up with an empirical definition of scaling-up –i.e., through revealed preferences-- that will allow policy makers to compare development performance and predictability across sectors and across countries.

Third, “institutional capital” was revealed as the most important form of capital determining scaling-up of poverty alleviation programs.

To systematically organize the available material, the cases were seen through the lenses of six forms of capital: physical, financial, human, natural, institutional and cultural¹. In terms of its content, institutional capital represents a rich compact (a vector) of many dimensions of poverty alleviation mostly linked to “the rules of the game”. For example, incentive structures (economic and non-economic), obligations, organizational arrangements, role of the private and public sector, governance, empowerment, voice, participation, etc. (see annexes for detailed explanations).

The relative balance across all forms of capital varies across sector groupings (e.g., community development, education, infrastructure and country studies). It was surprising to find very little evidence on the role of natural capital as a determinant of scaling-up. Natural capital as the access, management and control of natural resources and the environment. No community development program described the management and allocation of natural capital as a major factor in

¹ For an explanation of these forms of capital please see The Annual Review of Evaluation Results for 1987, and the application of the methodology to two country case studies (Nepal and Bolivia).

scaling-up.

Based on research done in the mid eighties, it is interesting to note that the patterns of capital accumulation shown in scaling up might suggest that some of these programs may not be sustainable in the longer-term. An effort is made hereto illustrate the case of education and rural development.

Fourth, if one disaggregates institutional capital into its components –‘human rights’, ‘non-market incentives’, ‘governance related’ and ‘others’-- and if one singles out of human rights, the study shows that this vector of rights, as seen by the authors of the case studies, is essential to the scaling-up poverty alleviation programs.

This constitutes a major finding. This result corroborates the hypothesis that violation of human rights is a major cause of poverty.

Methodology And Procedures

This paper used a similar methodology to the one used by the Annual Review of Evaluation Results, 1988. It is a simpler version of a “revealed preferences approach”. In this method, one searches for causality by establishing a direct relationship between what the authors of the case studies bring about in the text and the nature and scope of scaling-up poverty alleviation, rather than imposing a definition of scaling-up poverty.

In practice, one codifies each statement in relation to scaling-up (e.g., “participation, voice, financing, ...is an important dimension of scaling -up”). Then, one regroups all the statements made into different categories and quantifies the frequency distributions of these statements, grouped within a pre-defined set of categories. The codification is then carried out for each and every category: physical, financial, human, natural, institutional and cultural capital. Hundreds of statements were codified within and across these categories linking to six forms of capital that are most frequently found in explaining development effectiveness. Human rights considerations were grouped under the category of institutional capital.

All the statements were then ranked through the use of frequency distributions and, thus, illustrated their relative importance. This was followed by an analysis of intensity and distributional spreads, in order to see explicitly the existing patterns across different sectors and within each of the countries with a good number of cases and, finally, to formulate a few important hypotheses and policy conclusions.

The results presented in the next section of this paper are grouped into 4 categories: community development, education, infrastructure and country wide strategy. These groupings responded, in part to

sample size.

Similarly, the analysis went deeper into issues of human rights. The exercise was not trivial as most cases do not use the language of human rights. In this case, one was forced to distill ideas through the language of economic development. As a result, it is possible that the paper over-estimated the relative scores within the frequency distributions that make reference to human rights. This is to say, the paper may be attributing a given statement to a debate on human rights when, actually, the authors of the case studies may have been far from doing so!

Interpretation of the language used and figuring out the ultimate intent of that language in each the case studies were of essence. In light of the original findings, we grouped the case studies into five categories. One, those that directly mentioned the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; two, those that made explicit reference to possible impacts on human rights (e.g., upholding various rights); three, those that discuss human rights with the language of rights; fourth, those cases that discussed human rights with the language of development; and finally, those cases that totally ignore human rights.

Most Relevant Results

The presentation of results is grouped into three broad categories. First, on the relevance of human rights in the case studies, second, on the principal determinants of scaling-up poverty alleviation, and third, on the role of human rights in scaling-up poverty alleviation. These results are all inter-related.

I. Importance of Human Rights

As presented in Figure 1, there is a significant proportion of cases (23 out of 51) where the issues of rights were not even mentioned. Thus, everything else referred to as human rights related comes from the remainder case studies: a total of 28 cases, where there are 19 using the language of economic development in relation to human rights, and only 6 using the language of human rights as an important element during the identification of poverty issues and possible policy conclusions.

Overall, the cases that look into human rights in an economic development language are relatively large in numbers. One message may be that most policy makers understand human rights in the context of economic development and poverty alleviation, and do not see this theme just as issues of law or compliance.

This finding is compatible with what one hears in the international debate on human rights. It is also similar to what one sees in the language and content of the Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (CPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR). These include very clear operational definitions of human rights, like in the cases of the Right to Education and The Right To Health. These operational definitions focus mainly on such development issues as accessibility, availability and adaptability of these services.

Another interesting result is that, human rights were addressed more prominently in community development programs. Then it comes education and infrastructure. Most of the country strategies did not say much about human rights.

These findings have an important implication. Specifically, that most policy makers do not yet see the importance of human rights at the macroeconomic level. This is not new, as we acknowledge that the major criticisms against development institutions are related to the allocation of public expenditures, debt relief, structural adjustment, liberalization of trade, privatization and more.

The findings of this study are similar to those relating to the experience at the United Nations: a major vacuum in the debate on macroeconomic linkages to human rights, like the recent disagreements in the debate about The Right To Development (RTD). The RTD as a “compact” human right grouping all the other rights. It is a “macro” right within which most of the macroeconomic policies (national and international) are often discussed.

Economists have not yet seen these macroeconomic connections.

In contrast, policy makers see more clearly the role of rights and responsibilities and their influences and implications for the allocation of all resources in the local economy. These results call for a careful examination of community development programs; they may be a central vehicle for the fulfillment of rights and as successful forms of scaling up.

II. The Paradigm of Scaling-Up Poverty Alleviation

The starting point in finding a coherent approach to ‘interpret’ scaling-up, was to link it to the process of capital accumulation and, then assess the

relative importance of each of the forms of capital in that process. The results are telling.

The principal result is that most policy makers see institutional capital as the principal determinant of success in scaling-up poverty alleviation. This is to say, there is a major emphasis on issues of normativity and rule making. This emphasis is very compatible with the emphasis now given to the normative aspects of development (e.g., governance, empowerment, anti-corruption, gender equity, indigenous peoples,...). The main arguments are different from those development institutions were giving fifty years ago; i.e., the take-off in poverty alleviation depend mainly on the expansion of physical and financial capital.

As the analysis went along, it was surprising to see the lower relative importance given to the role of human capital. Figure 2, shows the aggregate of all the dimensions responsible for scaling up poverty alleviation. This aggregated picture does not necessarily correspond to what is happening at the sector level. In education, for example, human and physical capital are significant, while in infrastructure and country strategies financial and human capital were relatively important (see Figure 3 for details).

III. The Role Of Human Rights in Scaling-Up Poverty Alleviations

To analyze the relative importance of human rights in scaling-up poverty alleviation, the study disaggregated institutional capital (where most of the statements on human rights were contained) into four categories: human rights related, non-market incentives related, governance related, and a category of “others”.

The results are very robust. For example, out of all the statements made

on the above components of institutional capital, 38% were on issues of rights, compared with 23% on incentives and 15% on governance. The category “others” is nearly one-fourth of the total. This says that, in relative terms, successful scaling-up is mostly dependent on institutional capital. Another way of saying the same thing is that scaling-up is dependent on the way societies address issues of rights and responsibilities. In short, human rights are essential to the vector composition of institutional capital. Human rights, alone, in factorial terms, is more than other forms of capital put together.

One final run of the data illustrates some issues at the country level. In particular, the data on scaling up and human rights for India and China were aggregated. These are the countries that have the largest number of case studies in the population of 51 case studies this paper reviews. Specifically, the relative importance that the case studies in China gave to human rights was significant (i.e., nearly one-quarter of the components of institutional capital were on human rights). In India, nearly 60% of all components of institutional capital were on human rights).

Final Conclusion

One general conclusion is evident: that scaling up poverty alleviation must take explicitly into account issues of human rights and responsibilities. For the authors of the case studies, human rights are not just a matter of politics. On the contrary, they are an intrinsic component of creation of wealth, poverty alleviation and development effectiveness.

Finally, a subjective judgment: the case studies that have a serious and a systematic discussion of the role of human rights in poverty alleviation are richer in content and much more interesting to read.

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