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6. Notions of Poverty and Wealth in Coastal Zanzibar

The Policy Relevance of Local Perspectives

Introduction

This paper draws on empirical data from anthropological fieldwork in Jambiani – a coastal community on the main island (Unguja) of Zanzibar, Tanzania.¹ It illustrates the complex notions and manifestations of poverty and relative wealth from the perspectives of women who are engaged in seaweed farming. The paper also briefly discusses the perceptual frameworks and assumptions regarding poverty and measures to improve the livelihoods of poor people that form the basis for Zanzibar's National Poverty Reduction Vision and Plan. Furthermore, it reflects on one of the two guiding perspectives in Sweden's Policy for Global Development,² i.e. that the situations, needs and priorities of poor women, men and children must guide and inform all efforts to pursue the overarching policy goal (to contribute to equitable and sustainable global development), as well as the specific goal for Swedish development cooperation (to contribute to an environment supportive of poor people's own efforts to improve their quality of life).

¹ I am grateful to Sida/SAREC for the support granted to my research in Zanzibar. I am also indebted to the Institute of Marine Sciences (IMS), University of Dar es Salaam, and to the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Organisation (WIOMSA), both of them located in Zanzibar, for providing a welcoming, supportive and stimulating environment for my research. I am particularly grateful for the support and encouragement provided throughout by Dr Narriman Jiddawi (IMS) and Dr Julius Francis (WIOMSA).

² Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2003); see also Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2008).

A common feature of all three 'levels' (i.e. the individual who is experiencing poverty, the national policy in a developing country and the development policy in a donor country), is that poverty is conceptualised as a multidimensional problem. People who experience poverty, like the seaweed-cultivating women in our case below, are perfectly able to describe what poverty is all about and what is required for them to be able to improve their livelihoods. They refer to the interconnections between different dimensions of poverty, in terms of problems and constraints as well as opportunities to improve their lives. They provide meaning to the policy notion of poverty as 'multidimensional'. Poor people are rarely found to be passive 'victims'. They put the limited resources at their disposal to use in strategic ways, calculating the pros and cons of various options. Women and men who are poor and who explain what poverty is all about provide meaning to the policy notion of poverty as 'multidimensional'. The policy discourse on poverty and poverty reduction is different. The policy-making process is remote, and hence the tendency to objectify people: as 'poor', 'excluded', 'discriminated against', 'to be empowered' and so forth. In a policy setting, poverty is conceptualised as multidimensional in rather abstract, static and generic terms. Even if the current policy discourse of 'multidimensional poverty' represents a welcome and highly significant move from a conventional, narrow conceptualisation of 'the poor' in strict economic terms (e.g. income poverty), it is predominantly based on generalised assumptions rather than on an informed understanding of what matters to poor individuals and groups and of the relative importance of and connections between the different dimensions.

The argument underpinning this paper is that development policy and practice that seeks to improve the livelihoods of individuals who are poor must be based on a firm understanding of the basic characteristics of poverty, i.e. it is complex, context-specific, relative and dynamic (see e.g. Sida 2002). Complexity means that poverty comprises a wide range of aspects and circumstances. Also, the precise features of poverty are context-specific, i.e. they are derived from the particular environmental, socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics of the situations in which poverty is produced and prevails. Poverty is relative in the sense that it is defined by those concerned in relation to their notions of what is judged to be a decent life. Moreover, the manifestations of poverty will change over time. Individuals and groups may move in and out of poverty depending on local circumstances and on the interplay between local and

external forces and factors.³ The recognition of poverty as complex, context-specific, relative and dynamic constitutes a viable point of departure for more comprehensive inquiry into specific reasons for and manifestations of poverty (including interaction with and integration into wider socio-political and economic systems), local perceptions of poverty and development, and coping strategies applied and aspirations for a better life held by women and men who are poor. The insights and knowledge thus obtained should form the basis for policy formulation and for translating policy into appropriate strategies for action and concrete interventions that can support poor people's efforts to improve their lives.

In concord with the principles of partnership and national ownership of the development process, which is the cornerstone of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), governments like ours in Sweden and donor agencies like the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) are nowadays only to a limited extent in direct contact with poor people or their representative organisations in partner countries. Support for field-based projects and programmes is rapidly giving way to budget and sector support, and hence the potential is diminishing for donors to obtain first-hand information on local livelihoods from project-based expatriate staff and visiting consultants. Thus, government agencies in a developing country are, relatively speaking, much better positioned than donors to formulate policies, strategies and plans based on poor people's own problem definitions and suggestions for action. Hence, it is the partner country governments, institutions and organisations that carry the major responsibility for establishing and maintaining a dialogue with poor individuals and their legitimate representatives, and for rightly interpreting, assessing, analysing and bringing forward the problems, needs and interests of different categories of citizens who experience poverty. The results of such endeavours should form the basis not only for the government's own efforts to reduce poverty and promote development, but also for directing external actors. The latter include development co-

³ Deepa Narayan, a Senior Adviser on poverty analysis in the World Bank, has coordinated a global study (fifteen countries) on how and why individuals have been able to move more permanently out of poverty. She emphasises the importance of presenting a 'moving picture of poverty', compared with the 'single snapshots' of conventional poverty analysis. The study, which has obtained partial funding from Sweden (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), was completed in 2009. A first volume brings together background papers reflecting multidisciplinary perspectives on poor people's mobility (see Narayan and Petesh 2007). The second volume presents the findings and policy implications of the global study, based on narratives and responses from more than 60,000 women and men who have either been able to move out of poverty, or have fallen into poverty (see Narayan, Pritchett and Kapoor 2009).

operation agencies, but also other areas of policy and political decision making, such as international trade and private sector development.

This brings us to the role of anthropology and anthropologists in the context of development cooperation, which is the common theme of the papers presented in this volume.⁴ By sharing some of my experience from working within a development policy environment, I hope that I will provide convincing arguments to show that applied and academic anthropology can be mutually supportive, for the individual anthropologist who is involved in both and also for the institutional environment in which we work.

Practicing anthropology

The research in Zanzibar is my second major research undertaking in Tanzania. There are fundamental differences between the two. The first field research was carried out continuously over eighteen months (1976–77) in an agropastoral community at 1,700 metres above sea level in Tarime District east of Lake Victoria. My current research in Jambiani village on the south-eastern coast of Zanzibar's main island, Unguja, is based on short periods of field research (2–5 weeks) undertaken once or twice per year since 1998. A principal reason for the recurrent, brief visits is that other work has not permitted longer periods of fieldwork. However, for a research project dealing with coping strategies of poor women, men and families in the context of a changing macroeconomic, social and political environment, the possibility to make repeated visits over an extended time period has obvious advantages.

Another difference owes to my own professional development and the positions from which I have been able to apply my anthropological experiences and knowledge. To put it briefly, I have moved from a position as a university-based social anthropologist struggling to combine development consultancies with academic studies for a Ph.D. and subsequently for postgraduate research, to a fulltime employee as Senior Policy Adviser in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs determined to keep a foot in research by using odd weeks of overtime compensation and holidays to complete a

⁴ Although the focus here is on the role of anthropologists and anthropology, researchers and consultants from related social science disciplines, such as human geography and sociology, often fulfil the role of the 'anthropologist' in developing countries. Not only are there relatively few trained anthropologists in most developing countries, but the training of e.g. sociologists often includes anthropological theory and methods and hence the differences between the disciplines is often less marked than in Sweden and other northern countries.

research project that was commenced years before joining the ministry. I wrote my thesis while working fulltime as Director of the Development Studies Unit of the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. The unit was managing the department's collaboration agreement with Sida, through which anthropologists from all over Sweden and also from abroad were recruited for short-term assignments in Sweden or in partner countries. This was a time when the dualism of distinguishing between 'development anthropology' and 'anthropology of development' literally divided our departments into the 'pure academic' and 'applied' anthropologists.⁵ It was not only an unfair and unproductive divide but also artificial, because many of us were engaged in both elements, one way or the other, often to mutual benefit. Although my thesis was the kind of solid academic piece of anthropological work that resulted in a monograph on a broad range of aspects of community life and livelihoods, it was also very much stimulated by the experiences gained from consultancies for Sida and other agencies, including working in multidisciplinary teams. I carried out many assignments in close collaboration with agronomists, foresters, nutritionists and other natural scientists, and hence natural resource management and the complex social and economic factors behind child malnutrition are themes dealt with in the thesis.

My current research project in Zanzibar is also much inspired by collaboration with natural scientists, in a Sida/SAREC-funded regional multidisciplinary research and capacity-building programme, 'Eastern Africa Coastal and Marine Science Programme'. The programme was coordinated by the Institute of Marine Sciences (IMS) and later on by the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), both of them operating from Zanzibar. As part of the programme, my colleague Prudence Woodford-Berger (anthropologist, also working in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) and I coordinated a sub-programme specifically directed towards sociologists, anthropologists and geographers in the region. The core substance of capacity building for students from these disciplines was training courses and supplementary funding through Sida/SAREC to enable the students to carry out longer periods of fieldwork in coastal settings.⁶ The training courses focused on interactive methods and tech-

⁵ There is an immense body of literature dealing with these different, but also complementary, streams in anthropology. The critiques of 'applied' anthropology in relation to development assistance include Escobar (1991) and Ferguson (1997). A good overview and contribution to bridging the gap is provided in Gardner and Lewis (1996) and in Crewe and Harrison (1998).

⁶ When the sub-programme was established, there was hardly any social science research undertaken in coastal communities by national researchers and the interest and motivation to focus on coastal themes and populations was very limited. Two circumstances contributed to

niques for data collection, ranging from participant observation to some of the 'rapid' participatory techniques developed and promoted at the time by Robert Chambers and his colleagues at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex.⁷

The social science research agenda was largely developed in response to the research themes and findings in oceanography, marine geology and coastal and marine botany, the reason being that the social science component (including also environmental economics) came in rather late in the programme when science problems and themes had already been identified. The consequent 'reactive' approach to research themes was far from disadvantageous, however. In addition to fostering a welcoming, friendly attitude among the natural scientists, who felt that they had something to offer to the social scientists, it also helped the social science students and researchers to identify relevant and timely research topics, to a large extent emanating from the natural science agenda but requiring a social science approach and social science investigative methods.⁸

It was in the process of promoting an interest in coastal livelihoods among East African social science researchers and students that I began to consider Zanzibar as a possible new area for my own research. I submitted an application to Sida/SAREC and received funding. While I learned a lot about coastal and marine ecosystems and environmental challenges

this situation. First, fieldwork (usually only one month) for MA and Ph.D. degrees in sociology and anthropology were nearly always carried out during vacation in the student's home village or town. Secondly, very few students admitted to higher education originated from coastal areas outside the major coastal towns (e.g. Dar es Salaam, Maputo and Mombasa). Thus, we had to persuade and motivate students from non-coastal communities to opt for fieldwork on the coast or islands. The means at our disposal was to offer supplementary funding to cover the expenses of food and lodging during fieldwork (not only for one month but for longer periods, between three and eighteen months), and to arrange meetings where the students and their supervisors were able to meet with some of our more passionate colleagues in the natural sciences who would present their research and speak of the need for social scientists. Through this strategy we were able to recruit, train and fund three students and researchers from Kenya, three from Tanzania, one from Mozambique and two from Madagascar.

⁷ The first generation of such techniques were Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). These were later made more participatory and renamed Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). They were also partly inspired by anthropological approaches and methods. The philosophy and techniques are summarised in Chambers (1992 and 1997).

⁸ Examples of social science research projects include the role of traditional authority in the management of marine resources (Bazaruto Island, Mozambique), gender relations in the use and management of coastal resources (Zanzibar), the impact of changing coastal livelihoods on social and economic power relations (Saadani, Tanzania) and indigenous knowledge and management of mangrove forests (Kwale, Kenya). All of them addressed specific coastal and marine environmental issues and problems (e.g. the rapid deforestation of mangrove forests in Kenya), as part of the more general social science themes.

from science colleagues, I was also struck by the apparent lack of awareness of and insights into the livelihoods, skills and wisdom of the people who lived in the communities where the scientists conducted their field trials.⁹ When the matter was discussed, my impression was that the scientists often did not think it was worthwhile to consult local men and women to hear their views about e.g. resources available, seasonal variations, ecosystem changes, and so forth.¹⁰ They did not expect local people to possess knowledge and experience of significance to the research. From an anthropological point of view, it is obvious that the inhabitants of tropical coastal settlements possess a wealth of detailed and accurate knowledge about the ecological systems that form the very basis for their livelihoods. It is also obvious that although they construct and explain the environmental realities in emic rather than in scientific terms, their knowledge is not therefore less accurate and precise. What most of the scientists did not appreciate was that such experience-based knowledge can provide important clues and explanations to the science questions, i.e. local women and men can be worthy partners in a dialogue on how and why the ecosystems have deteriorated. They can and should also be partners in decisions and efforts made with the aim to improve the management of natural resources in ways that are sustainable. Examples of the latter include the management of marine reserves, mangrove forests and coral reefs; and the introduction of closure periods to sustain fish populations.

I joined the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Department for Global Development) in mid-2002. This was the time when Sweden's Policy for Global Development was formulated (the Government presented the Bill to Parliament in May 2003). The policy is based on a whole-of-government approach to poverty reduction and development and firmly founded on a common goal (to contribute to equitable and sustainable development) and two guiding perspectives (a rights perspective and the perspectives of poor people on their own situations, needs and capabilities) that would be shared by all government departments. The responsibility for formulating the policy was vested in our department. My par-

⁹ Two notable exceptions to a more general lack of awareness are Dr Narriman Jiddawi (IMS), who holds a Ph.D. in Fisheries, and the late Professor Adeleida Semesi (Department of Botany, University of Dar es Salaam), who gained international repute as a specialist in mangroves. Both of them have published articles and reports on gender aspects of coastal livelihoods and production, indigenous knowledge of coastal and marine natural resources and experiences of involving local communities in coastal zone management.

¹⁰ The different views on the accuracy of local knowledge about natural resources stimulated a group of social and natural scientists to write a joint article in which we describe and analyse some coastal and marine 'science' features from the perspectives of local inhabitants (see Tobisson et al. 1998).

ticipation in this challenging work therefore became the entry point to a new professional life as an anthropologist, now in the Government Offices and participating in the formulation of development policy. It was obvious from the employment interview that my anthropological experience from research (including the current research in Zanzibar) as well as development consultancies was decisive for obtaining the position, which formed part of an interdisciplinary set-up of posts covering various areas of development policy (in my case: 'social development').

In 2005, the Department for Global Development was split into three independent departments, the principal reason being that it had grown to a rather unmanageable size (78 staff members). The policy group to which I belonged formed the nucleus of a new Department for Development Policy. In addition to responsibility for the development and monitoring of Swedish development cooperation policies, both generally and with regard to specific policy areas, our mandate includes analytical work and promoting the coherent contributions of different political and policy areas of the government to the common goal and the two analytical perspectives of the policy for global development. The policy areas include, among others, trade and business investment, economy and finance, security and defence, migration and the environment.

One of the principal areas of responsibility assigned to me and my colleague (a human rights specialist) in the new department was to be the 'guardians' of the two guiding perspectives. This included helping to ensure that decisions and measures taken in various areas of the Government Offices were informed by, or could be expected to promote, the situations and interests of poor individuals and groups of poor people in developing countries, and that a rights perspective was applied. The task posed huge challenges, if we were not simply to transfer an opportunistic policy language but also to make sure that colleagues in other departments had understood the meaning of it and were able to assess the implications of various political decisions in the context of the new policy framework.¹¹

I shall come back to the policy notion of 'the perspectives of poor people on development' and to my experience of the work to promote it within the Government Offices. What I would like to mention here is that my anthropological experience from research as well as development consultancies has been immensely valuable in this work. It helps me to recall real situations of poverty that I have encountered over the years – as a

¹¹ Raymond Apthorpe refers to the power of policy language, which he describes as a language 'to please and persuade rather than inform and describe'. Apthorpe's article is part of a now classic volume on anthropological approaches to policy: Shore and Wright (1997).

steady reminder that poverty situations and measures to cope with poverty are indeed complex and varied.

Jambiani – Inhabitants and livelihoods

My current research is in Jambiani village on the south-eastern coast of the main island, Unguja, in the Zanzibar archipelago. The approximately 4,000 inhabitants dwell on a narrow strip of land on the waterfront, only a few hundred metres wide and extending for some five kilometres. The settlements are concentrated on both sides of a dirt road connecting Jambiani and the neighbouring Paje village to the north. Before the beginning of 2007, the road came to an end in Jambiani. Makunduchi village to the south could only be reached by foot or bicycle, and by the odd driver who, at the risk of having the tyres cut by the sharp coral stones, ventured to drive through the bush. Beyond the village is the vast and inhospitable coral rag. It is covered by thick thorn, and it is here that the villagers, using swidden technique, grow cassava, sweet potatoes, papaya, some maize and a few varieties of pulses that can manage almost without topsoil and with very limited rainfall. The villagers also use the coral rag to browse the few cattle and goats, and as the source of fuel-wood and coral stone for lime making.

The Jambiani villagers' ethnic identity is *waShirazi*, a section of the complexly organized *waSwahili* ('people of the coast') who for centuries have blended in settlements along the coast between southern Somalia and northern Mozambique.¹² The different Swahili groups all adhere to Islam and they speak dialects of *kiSwahili*. Ties of kinship in combination with territorial belonging are highly significant for group identity and solidarity in Swahili communities. Although the importance attached to patrilineality is increasing, particularly when natural resources become scarce, individuals are concerned about their descent on both the maternal and paternal line. The character of wider, usually dispersed kin groups (*ukoo* and *tumbo*) is bilateral ('kindred'), whereas the members of a group (*mlango*) who reside, manage property and work together centre around a cluster of men related by common grandparental origin and their wives and children. The continued importance of the bilateral kin group is made manifest in situations of divorce, when women commonly return to and are provided shelter by brothers or mothers' brothers.

¹² A comprehensive overview of the waSwahili is provided in Middleton (1992).

Access to land for cultivation in the vast coral rag area beyond the village is based on descent from a common ancestor who, according to legends, was the first to settle in the area and thereby secured the user-rights of descendants. Although coral rag land is not scarce, the rights to specific plots (*konde*) surrounded by stone walls (*bigili*) are firmly regulated by customary tenure rules. It is the stone wall rather than the land itself as a productive asset (productivity is very low) that represents a value worth keeping and passing on through inheritance. The rules regulating the individual ownership, transfer and inheritance of coconut palms are complex and nowadays subject to continued reinterpretation and reconstruction. The reason for this is the steadily increasing economic value of land close to the beach. The ownership of coconut palms marks the ownership of the land on which they grow. The palm trees can be sold to entrepreneurs in the tourism business, or to people from the major town on the island (Stonetown) or from abroad who build private villas along the beach. Apart from inheritance, the mode of transferring rights to land in the settlement area close to the beach is thus by selling and purchasing coconut palms growing on the land in question.¹³

The Swahili saying *Kaskazi mja naswi, kusi mja na mtama* ('The north-east wind comes with the fish, the south-west wind comes with sorghum') points to a regular cycle of natural events which, to a large extent, determines the coastal activities on a seasonal as well as daily basis. The monsoons not only dictate the direction of the ocean trade in which the Swahili have a long and proud history,¹⁴ but they also bring the rain that is vital for agricultural production and they determine the availability of species and hence the options for fishing and collecting in the shallow waters and on the reef. Most daily activities follow the rhythm of monsoons and tides. As is typical for coastal populations in rural eastern Africa, the inhabitants of Jambiani combine elements of terrestrial and marine resources for their subsistence. The principal features include fishing, collecting in shallow waters, farming, coconut palms, livestock, handicraft, petty-trade and, since the early 1990s, seaweed farming.

¹³ It is not possible here to provide details on the extremely interesting and important topic of land transactions. Even so, a general remark can be made that although sales of palm trees has made some villagers rather wealthy, the villagers are nearly always on the losing side in negotiations with outsiders. The transfers made in recent years demonstrate very clearly the disconnect between formal legislation on the one hand, and local perceptions of ownership as a bundle of rights and responsibilities on the other. The notion of 'bundle of rights' was first introduced in Bruce (1988). It refers to the several rights constituting a tenure or, alternatively, all rights belonging to various persons or groups in a piece of property.

¹⁴ See e.g. Prins (1965); Sheriff (1987).

Seaweed farming¹⁵ was introduced on a larger scale in Zanzibar in the late 1980s, in response to a government initiative to encourage foreign investments. The two multinational companies that started the business have remained in control of the sector since then. Although seaweed farming has spread to other areas in Zanzibar, the south-east coast where Jambiani is located and where the vast intertidal flat area provides exceptionally good opportunities and space for everyone, has remained a focus area for the industry. The shore and the intertidal waters are looked upon as an extension of terrestrial lands, and in this respect they form part of the common property of the kin group. Like the terrestrial farms, the individual seaweed plots are referred to as *konde*, and the terminology used for agricultural tasks (e.g. planting, weeding and harvesting) applies to the seaweed tasks as well.

Women seaweed farmers in Jambiani

The scene is a seaweed farming area on the vast intertidal flat outside the village. Some hundred women are working efficiently in the shallow water to make the most of the approximately three hours they are able to spend in their individual farms before the tide turns. This is the first day of the spring tide and hence many women have a crop to harvest. The crop has been left to mature during the neap tide, when the farms are not accessible. If the seaweed is not harvested promptly at the beginning of the spring tide, the risks are high that the now heavy bunches of twigs are torn off the ropes by the strong tidal currents. Harvesting is swiftly done – the bunches of twigs are simply ripped off the ropes, each of the ropes tied to sticks that the women have anchored in the seabed, and stuffed into discarded rice bags. A seaweed farm (*konde*) is measured by the number of ropes it contains, usually between forty and fifty. A woman who depends primarily on seaweed farming for her livelihood needs is usually handling three or four such farms. Each farm has its own cycle of growth and maturity, implying that all farm activities (planting, ‘weeding’ and harvesting) can be carried out simultaneously.

Planting is much more time consuming than harvesting. Small bunches of seaweed (*mbegu*, seeds) taken from the harvested crop are carefully tied onto ropes using plastic thread (tie-tie) that are either provided by one of the two multinational seaweed companies operating in Jambiani, or purchased in village shops. The spots now empty due to harvesting have to

¹⁵ The two major species are *Eucheuma spinosum* and *Eucheuma cottonii*. The principal uses of the produce are in the food industry and in the bio-chemical industry.

be replanted as quickly as possible to commence a new growing cycle. The crop will mature in about five to six weeks' time, which means that a new harvest is normally reaped during the third consecutive spring tide.

The women whose farms are located close to the channel between the coral reef and the intertidal flat are the first to notice that the water is coming back. They yell out a warning to their fellow-women: 'Get ready! The water wants to go home [to reach the shore]. Look how the small crabs are waving' [the crabs that hide in the seaweed raise their claws at the first contact with the water]. The women have already stuffed the seaweed in bags, each bag containing approximately 25 kilos wet weight of the crop. A typical harvest amounts to five to seven bags. The bags are tied to a thick rope. 'Getting ready' means that a woman ties the rope around her waist and makes herself ready to haul (*burura*) her bags along to the shore at the pace of the incoming tide. Since none of the women can swim, this can be a risky venture. A woman has to walk in water deep enough to enable the bags to float so as to relieve the weight (seven bags amounting to ca. 175 kilos), but not so deep that she risks losing contact with the sand and coral beneath her feet. Even if the women try to move forward together in small groups, there is always the risk of falling behind because of an excessive load, or getting oneself entangled in the ropes.

Local perceptions of relative poverty and wealth

Bi Moni, a divorced woman aged sixty plus, laments that she is no longer able to haul more than six bags. When I try to encourage her by pointing out that the dry weight of her six bags is worth some 5,000 shillings (ca. 5 US dollars; the 25-kilo contents of a bag are reduced to 7 to 8 kilos after it has been cleaned and dried in the sun for some three days), she yells that this is not good enough! '*Nakula usiku! Nataka kula mapema!*' – 'I eat late in the evening! I want to eat early!'

Bi Moni and her friend Bi Aisha both nod in the direction of a woman at some distance in the seaweed farming area, telling me that 'Bi Halima is eating early' (*anakula mapema*). Bi Halima is also getting ready for the return of the water, but she will not be hauling the bags. While the vast majority of women are struggling to tie their bags to the waist rope and place them in position not to get intertwined when the water comes, Bi Halima has climbed up on the top of her heap containing some fifteen bags. She is waving to a man who makes a timely arrival in his outrigger canoe (*ghalawa*) to bring her bags to the shore for money.

Like a steadily growing number of women in Jambiani, Bi Moni is now depending solely on seaweed farming for her livelihood needs. She

knows that she has put herself in a vulnerable position by abandoning her agricultural farm in the coral rag area, but she feels that the strength and time at her disposal are not enough to keep up both elements. Being single and fostering three small children of relatives, she has come to the conclusion that a small but steady and fairly predictable cash income puts her in a safer position than would be the case if she divided her time and effort between the seaweed and the agricultural farm. She knows that she will not be able to resume agricultural farming on the plot she abandoned more than a year ago, unless she is prepared to make a huge labour input. In the coral rag area, leaving a farm idle even for a single season means that it is near to impossible to cultivate the same plot again. Wild boar invade farms that are not visited more or less daily by people. The boar break through the stone wall surrounding each individual farm and destroy everything in their way in search of tubers. Not only does the thin layer of soil between the coral rocks vanish, but it also takes a lot of work to rebuild the walls strongly enough to stand up to an attack – the wild boar will continue to strike at the weak passages, make their way through and continue searching for food until they have turned every stone. Bi Moni has not taken the ultimate step of selling the coral stones that make up the wall to buyers from Zanzibar town who deal with building material. The wall is her ‘bank’, she claims, a last resort in case of an emergency.

Bi Halima – the woman who hires a man to bring her seaweed to the shore – is ‘eating early’. This is not because she is earning a higher income from seaweed farming than her fellow-women, but because she is married to a senior government official. He is paid a monthly wage of a size that very few men in the village are able to earn from fishing or petty-business, and so there is money to pay for the transportation of bags and also, if need be, for domestic tasks such as collecting firewood. Bi Moni ‘eats late’ because of long working hours and limited cash. Coming back from the seaweed farm, she often has to walk far into the coral rag area to collect firewood and she will also need to spend time collecting water from one of the village wells. If time allows, she will bring the foster children for a long walk on the beach and in the shallow waters to collect seaweed that has broken adrift from the ropes or bags and that can now be picked by anyone. Then, eventually, she can start looking for food to prepare a meal that will be ready later in the evening. If the seabed is dry, she may try to fill a small bowl with shellfish and small fish that have been trapped in shallow ponds. Together with cassava or sweet potatoes, this will make up an evening meal. Women in Bi Moni’s situation usually have to wait until the fishermen have sold whatever they can at higher prices and are pre-

pared to serve customers who can pay very little, or when the leftover tubers and vegetables are available at a reduced price at the close of business.

The possibility to draw on kin, neighbours and friends to make ends meet is an extremely important asset for women who are poor in Jambiani. If a woman fails to secure food to prepare an evening meal, or if sickness prevents her from tending to the seaweed farm, she will be assisted by female kin and neighbours. A requirement is that she is known to be hard working and that she herself obeys to the spirit of reciprocity, i.e. that she shares widely and generously when there is anything to share. Social capital also includes the maintenance of trustful relationships between resource-poor villagers and villagers who are wealthier. Poor women remain loyal customers in village shops where they know that they can obtain credit, even if other shops may offer a better price on specific items. The importance of maintaining and building social capital is manifested at the time of late evening meals, when the children of households who have managed to secure leftover food swiftly run around to deliver small bowls to less fortunate kin and neighbours and to elderly relatives. Elderly people and people with disabilities are never left without an evening meal, but they are expected to do what they can to provide for themselves. It is not uncommon for elderly women to tend their own, small seaweed farm as a source of petty cash (*kununua sabuni*, enough 'to buy soap').

The notions of 'eating late' and 'eating early' thus capture several interconnected dimensions of poverty and relative wealth. The economic dimension is central (i.e. long working hours because of a need for cash to buy food, to pay for labour, etc.). In Bi Moni's case, 'eating late' also signifies being elderly and managing the household without the support of a husband, and hence the need to prioritise among elements that together could make for a more secure and sustainable livelihood. Bi Aisha, who is younger, married and has four children, is also 'eating late'. In addition to the drudgery she shares with most of her fellow-women in Jambiani, her husband is occasionally joining a friend on fishing expeditions, but the catches are diminishing and the owner of the canoe is eager to bring the fish to Zanzibar town to get a higher price, leaving only small portions to be shared by the fishing team. The employment opportunities in Jambiani are very limited. The tourist business was promising in the 1990s, but it has decreased dramatically for several reasons. Many tourists have been frightened off by the political unrest accompanying the past two national elections. Zanzibar has also not been able to compete successfully with other tropical tourist destinations, as far as airfares, cost of living and

environmental standard are concerned. There has been a shift in the government's tourism policy, towards aiming for so-called 'high-spending' visitors at the expense of backpackers. The latter spend less per person, but the impact on economic opportunities in the coastal villages was considerable in the 1990s when they visited the islands in vast numbers. Very few villagers are nowadays able to rely solely on tourism-related jobs in guesthouses and small restaurants. Moreover, a job in a guesthouse commonly means that one is on compulsory 'leave' (*likizu*) without pay for at least half the year when very few tourists visit the island.

While these and other circumstances, including a constant shortage of time to make ends meet, are captured in the expression 'eating late', the villagers also associate poverty with other manifestations of deprivation or, in Amartya Sen's terms, lack of freedoms (Sen 2001). Being poor means that you are not treated with respect by government officials, teachers, hospital staff, etc.

These people don't know what it is like to be poor. Even if medical treatment in the village hospital is free, we have to pay for medicine. And since medicine is not available in the hospital or in Jambiani shops, we must pay for the transport to go to town to buy the medicine.

Also, people who are poor invariably fight a losing battle when they try to negotiate compensation for land and trees.

We are approached by investors who have already obtained a permit from Government authorities to build a guesthouse, and this is why our compensation can be nothing but low.

Poor clothing and poor housing are also signs of destitution. People try their very best not to demonstrate their poverty. For the celebration of the major Muslim feasts (such as Id il-Fitr at the close of Ramadan), or of important events in the family and kin group (such as weddings), even the poorest families in Jambiani do everything they can to dress up their children in new clothes.

Jambiani villagers often speak of the entire village settlement as poor, the principal reason being the bad road that up to early 2007 used to be the only means of entry to the village.¹⁶ 'Look at the road,' said Ali while

¹⁶ In the beginning of 2007, the government, using World Bank funds, embarked on a major infrastructure project to extend the tarmac road from Paje, through the coral rag area to Makunduchi. Jambiani is now accessible through three feeder roads. The villagers are extremely proud of the new road and have great hopes that it will 'bring development' to their village.

kicking a coral stone sharp as a knife. ‘The only good thing it brings is that thieves and thugs do not trouble the village. You can’t leave the village quick enough on a bicycle.’ The poor state of the road was evident. While there were frequent daily buses between town and Paje, only a few ventured to make their way to Jambiani. The coral path between Paje (where the tarmac ended before the road was extended) and Jambiani, which stretches beautifully along the ocean, has been an unforgettable scenic memory for the odd tourist, but it did not attract business of a kind that could create employment for the villagers, including tourism. The minibuses bringing tourists from town to the east coast to find places to stay do their best to make the visitors settle for guesthouses in Paje or Bwejuu to the north, and hence Jambiani gets relatively few. Also, the relative inaccessibility of Jambiani means that visits by extension staff from various government departments (e.g. agriculture, water/sanitation and fisheries) are less common.

Livelihood strategies and tactics

Being poor in Jambiani does not mean being without assets and options. Everyone can make livelihood choices even if the resources are limited. Labour availability and capacity together with social capital are the most important assets in the possession of individuals and families who are poor. Individuals who are able to work try hard to support themselves and their families, while also supporting others who for various reasons, permanently or temporarily, are unable to work. The possibility to draw on bonding social capital¹⁷ is dependent on your own readiness to work and to assist others – anyone who is able to work must do so in order to be entitled to support in times of need.

Women, men and families in Jambiani apply elaborated diversification tactics and strategies in their efforts to secure their livelihoods. They are sensitive to external socio-political, economic and ecological factors and processes of change and they will make every effort to comply with changing circumstances. Their choices are based on thorough calculations of risks and opportunities at a particular point in time and they are perfectly able to justify and stand up for the decisions made. Although individuals

¹⁷ A distinction is made between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital; the former refers to close ties and high levels of trust with others like themselves, and the latter to a situation when poor people’s groups establish ties and alliances in order to access new resources managed by other groups. ‘Bonding’ social capital has to be accompanied by ‘bridging’ social capital in order to generate social movements that can bring about structural change. These concepts are further elaborated in Narayan (2005).

and families who experience poverty are generally more concerned about minimising risks than maximising profit (see e.g. Dasgupta 1995), it is clear that Jambiani villagers who are poor consider very carefully if and how they can make use of opportunities to increase their small assets. Whether or not we label those considerations and choices ‘strategies’ or ‘tactics’, depends on the options available and the expected outcome.¹⁸ Let us take the example of two women who are abandoning their agricultural farms in the coral rag to resort to seaweed farming. Both women know that they will not be able to resume farming once the farms have been left idle, the reason being the irreversible damage caused by wild boar when the women are not there to guard the plots. One of the women calculates strategically that she will use the higher income from seaweed farming to buy the food she needs. She may also sell the stone wall surrounding the farm as material for house building. This woman abandons her farm for proactive reasons (aiming for a higher cash return for labour). The other woman’s decision to desert her farm is reactive and defensive. Her health is poor and she is lacking strength. She is not able to keep up two production activities in different locations far apart, but she is likely to retain the stone wall as a security should her situation deteriorate further. Her tactic is to opt for seaweed farming and the anticipated outcome is her hope that she will stand a better chance of coping with her situation of limited resources and vulnerability. She is likely to stay poor because she is poor (i.e. a poverty trap¹⁹); her ambition is simply to get by. From a women’s empowerment point of view, to use the terminology of Kabeer (2001),²⁰ the first woman has the ability and power to make (strategic) choices between alternative options, while the second woman is acting in the absence of real power to choose. She is making a reactive move to comply with a deteriorating livelihood situation.

Accompanying the growing need for cash income, seaweed farming has been instrumental for the women’s livelihood options. The seaweed farming technique was initially introduced to small groups of male villagers, but very soon it became a female occupation. The explanation given

¹⁸ De Certeau defines strategy as a conscious, deliberate series of plans or actions which are calculated in terms of a clear vision of the potential outcomes, while tactics are more defensive and reactive practices to find a way of making do (de Certeau 1984).

¹⁹ The difference between a ‘poverty trap’ and an ‘inequality trap’ is elaborated in Bebbington, Dani, de Haan and Walton (2007). The poverty trap implies that a person or household lacks a minimum level of human or physical capital so that it barely produces enough for subsistence. An inequality trap involves persistence in ranking, i.e. assets may be accumulated by poor people but then also by wealthier people, maintaining status quo.

²⁰ The notion of power or ‘ability to make choices’ is central to Naila Kabeer’s conceptualisation of women’s empowerment.

by men is that in those days most of them were involved in other cash-generating activities, such as fishing and petty-trade, and they were also less keen to involve themselves in seaweed farming because of the limited cash returns for a high labour input. Some men also recall that they did not feel comfortable spending long hours on the intertidal flat together with a steadily growing number of female seaweed farmers. Today, only a handful of men cultivate seaweed. Those who do are typically elderly men from families that stand out as having an exceptional collaborative spirit (i.e. where the wife, husband and youngsters share most of the work without bothering much about a gender- or age-specific division of responsibilities), or young men who have left school but not yet married and who see this as an opportunity to earn some money. Women, on the other hand, had few other options to earn cash income. Seaweed farming was therefore looked upon as an attractive business, in spite of the hard work and low return for labour.

A primary reason why seaweed has remained and increased in popularity among the women is that the outcome is fairly predictable. A woman managing one or several seaweed farms can count on a regular, albeit small, cash income throughout the year. The regularity is based on the five- to six-week growing cycle of the crop, meaning that there is usually something to harvest at the beginning of each spring tide (twice per month) that can be sold for cash after three days of drying in the sun. If a woman is in desperate need of cash, she can decide to harvest early, or she may opt for leaving the crop to grow to the next cycle to get a better harvest (but always calculating on the risk of losing part of the crop due to excessive weight). The predictability of a cash income also means that the women stand a greater chance of purchasing on credit in the village shops – the shop owners know that the debt will be paid. In spite of a very limited cash income per kilo of dried seaweed sold (the price has been more or less constant at 100–120 Tanzania shillings, approximately 1/10 of a US-dollar), women make every effort to save money. The community-based saving societies (all members are obliged to contribute a specific sum every week or fortnight; the accumulated funds can be used by each member in turn) and the recently introduced mobile bank that visits the village every Saturday are very popular, particularly among the women. Small savings are spent on clothes for the children and a feast at the close of Ramadan. More long-term investments include better housing and children's continued education. Such investments appear to be the concern of women rather than men.

The women speak proudly of their seaweed farming and it is evident that the business has empowered many to make their own livelihood

choices and shape their lives, including the decision to divorce a husband who they judge to be ‘eating – but not working’ (*‘anakula tu – hafanye kazi’*). Even if it entails hard work and although they constantly complain about the poor remuneration, they value the cash income, including the importance of predictability of income. In most cases a woman can make her own decisions as to how to use the money. However, the women in Jambiani share the plight of most women who live under similar circumstances, i.e. when they begin to earn a cash income they also become solely responsible for children’s clothing, etc., and for purchasing most of the basic consumer goods needed.

In spite of its popularity, the women are very much aware of the risks accompanying specialisation in seaweed farming at the expense of maintaining more diversified livelihood options. They fear a diminishing commitment from the companies purchasing the seaweed and they make their own interpretations of signals in this direction. It happens now and then that the local seaweed offices have not been supplied with sufficient cash to pay the growers and this provides grounds for rumours that the companies are about to abandon the village. When cash is not available, the farmers get a receipt upon delivery of the crop and are asked to return after a couple of days or even a week to get their money.²¹ The women also worry about the possible invasion of pest and disease that may terminate the production of seaweed in Zanzibar altogether.²²

The ideal is to keep up agriculture while also doing seaweed farming. Agricultural farming is mainly concentrated in the two periods of neap tide per month when the seaweed is left to grow. Yet, depending on the general situations experienced by the women, they may have to opt for concentrating on other things than farming between the spring tides. An increasing number of women are struggling hard to keep up both activities with very limited means, and they also supplement the cash income and food produce by engaging themselves in petty-business (rope-making, sewing male headdresses, baking cakes and offering dinner in a home

²¹ On one occasion when rumours spread that the women were not going to be paid for the crop until several weeks later, many women took a joint decision to keep the dried seaweed until they were assured that they would be paid upon delivery. They made it clear that they were prepared to stay with the seaweed for weeks if necessary. This venture demonstrated that protesting was worthwhile – the seaweed officers in Jambiani found out about the women’s plan and the cash was available the next morning.

²² The two varieties of seaweed grown were originally brought from the Philippines and hence they are not part of the natural flora of the western Indian Ocean. They are grown extensively in the Philippines, using a much more labour-saving technique that cannot be applied in the shallow waters along the East African Coast. The labour-intensive technique used in Zanzibar, in combination with a low remuneration to the growers, is likely to be the principal reason why Zanzibar is still of interest to the multinational companies.

environment to tourists), octopus fishing on the reef, etc. The women who maintain their agricultural farms often speak of fellow-women who do not, as ‘stupid’ (*wajinga*) and ‘lazy’ (*wavivu*), although they are well aware of the fact that there is a fine line between the ideal of diversifying livelihood activities (to minimise risks and maximise outcomes) and the predicament of not being able to do so. Anybody can end up in a situation where the only reasonable alternative is to opt for fewer livelihood activities and hence the vulnerability increases. In addition to ageing, the reasons for specialisation may be health problems, being left alone with small children due to divorce or widowhood, or caring for sick or elderly family members.

The policy environment of poverty reduction

The seaweed-growing women in our case above give clear voice to a multidimensional perception of poverty and relative wealth. Having or not having cash to get by is vital – but poverty is reflecting a much broader state of deprivation. The same applies to what they perceive as improvements in their lives – real improvements necessitate changes in several dimensions. They demonstrate clearly that they do everything they can to secure their livelihoods, using strategies and tactics to avoid risks and to make use of the opportunities available.

Policy makers and planners have increasingly become alert to the multidimensional nature of poverty and hence the need for broad-based measures that include, but go beyond, the economic dimension. There is also a growing recognition of the importance of consulting and involving poor people in the analysis of reasons behind poverty and in identifying supportive measures that can help them to improve their lives. In spite of increased awareness, however, there is a long way to go before the women, men and children who are the intended beneficiaries of national poverty reduction strategies and plans, and of donor country policies, also become the real participants in and beneficiaries of such ventures. The awareness of the multidimensional nature of poverty and of the importance of participatory approaches is too often limited to one-time-only consultations and to putting catchwords into documents and policy speeches, whereas more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to poor people’s participation in analyses and decisions affecting their lives are required for real empowerment. Such approaches were applied quite effectively in individual project settings, using the participatory and ‘rapid’ approaches and techniques pioneered by Robert Chambers and others in

the 1990s, but they were not widely accepted either by agencies and institutions in developing countries or by donors.

So what are the options for development policy to become more responsive to poor people's own perspectives on poverty and to what is required for them to improve their livelihoods? In the following we shall look briefly into Zanzibar's policy framework for poverty reduction, and also into the meaning and practicability of 'poor people's perspectives on development' as a guiding principle in Sweden's Policy for Global Development. I will share some of my experience of working to promote this guiding principle in the Government Offices. I shall then wind up by reflecting briefly on the value of anthropology and anthropologists in the current development cooperation and development policy setting.

Zanzibar's Poverty Reduction Policy

In January 2002, the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), issued its Development Vision 2020 and the first Zanzibar Poverty Reduction Plan (ZPRP).²³ The stated, overall objective of the Vision is to eradicate absolute poverty, through 'increasing the ability of the people to obtain the basic necessities, namely food, better shelter/housing, adequate and decent clothing, improving democracy and social security'. The Vision declares that poverty eradication should be synonymous with increasing access to employment opportunities, essential services and income-generating activities, and through providing social safety nets for the most vulnerable. According to the Vision, this entails empowering and creating opportunities for the people, increasing production and household income, improving living conditions through better access to basic physical and social services and establishing a social security system that protects the poor, disabled, the elderly and other vulnerable groups. The ZPRP

²³ It is noteworthy that the Government of Tanzania Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper does not include Zanzibar. This exclusion manifests the polarisation between the mainland and the semi-autonomous islands. It is also worth noting that the government of Zanzibar was assisted by the UNDP in the collection of data and actual formulation of the Vision and Plan. Zanzibar is not, however, an exception in this regard. Most, if not all, first generation national poverty reduction strategy papers have been compiled with varying degrees of involvement of external agencies, usually the World Bank or the UNDP. This is a principal factor accounting for the common use of a globally accepted development discourse (e.g. 'multidimensional poverty' and 'participation') in such documents – a language that speaks to potential donors. Also, we must assume that the high degree of external involvement, often leadership, has implications for the extent to which a government is in practice willing and able to assume responsibility for the approach outlined, for implementing the measures drawn up in the strategy and plan and for monitoring the effects.

echoes the Vision. It is said to be based on a 'broadly participative and consultative process', through 'Grassroots Consultation Meetings' organised on a single day in December 2000. The objective of the consultations was to find out how a cross section of society in Unguja and Pemba [i.e. the two main islands of the Zanzibar archipelago] perceived poverty and what they thought should be done to reduce it. The consultations covered 'a range of issues based on a standardised listing with a variety of community groups, including from those recognised as poor within their own communities'.²⁴

Both the Vision and the ZPRP reflect a multidimensional view of poverty and development, by referring to 'income' and 'non-income' poverty and by focusing on a range of 'basic necessities'. Although this broad outlook is positive, it should be noted that the documents are referring to formal employment only, thereby overlooking the informal sector of the economy where most of the poor women and men who have a job earn a living. When the women in Jambiani speak about the need for job opportunities for their sons and daughters, they do not primarily visualise employment in the formal sector (this is beyond reach of most people in the rural areas), but in informal enterprises which may be accessible through the networks of kin, neighbours and friends.²⁵ The Plan proposes a broad spectrum of strategic interventions. The main focus is on increasing employment opportunities, but the plan also echoes the concerns expressed during the grassroots consultation, i.e. for improved education, health, water, agriculture and infrastructure.

Although the broad, multidimensional outlook of the vision and plan is commendable, there is a fundamental difference between the policy recognition of poverty as multidimensional, and the holistic and integrated notions and experiences of poverty expressed by individuals when they describe their problems and also the prospects to improve their lives. For the women and men in Jambiani who experience poverty in its manifold dimensions, better health is an aim in itself, but they also see a need to link better health to increased opportunities for education and jobs. Improved water services must go hand in hand with access to health and

²⁴ It is unfortunate that more detailed information is not available on how the consultations were made and who participated.

²⁵ The concepts of formality and informality have been subject to debate in development research and practice for a long time. There is a general agreement that more research is needed on the relationships of the informal sector to the rest of the economy, that 'informal' labour arrangements can be ever so formal and structured in their own terms and that policies introduced to 'formalise' informal employment arrangements may have counterproductive consequences. A collection of papers dealing with the interrelationships between the formal and informal economy is available in Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur and Ostrom (2006).

sanitation facilities. A rise in production and consumption necessitates better transport facilities and a market that is sensitive to the needs and opportunities of women and men who have limited resources. And so forth. From the viewpoint of policy makers and planners, the outlook may well be holistic, but the measures are proposed and implemented sectorwise through specialised government agencies and NGOs (usually without much coordination) and the prioritisations between different areas, villages, etc. are bound to vary (for political reasons, among others). Thus, agricultural productivity may be improved in one location through the provision of chemical fertilisers and advice from extension staff, but unless there is a passable road and means of transportation (which may well be the focus of development interventions in another area) the crop will not reach the market and hence farmers will not obtain the much-needed cash income.

Although there is no straightforward solution to the problem of a government delivering piecemeal development, two reflections can be made with the case of Zanzibar in mind. First, government agencies ought to establish structures and routines to enable a continuation of the initial dialogue with local communities that took place as part of e.g. the preparation of a national poverty reduction strategy or plan. This would not only improve the credibility of the government in the eyes of the citizens, but would also increase the options for a more flexible approach that can accommodate local initiatives using local, government and donor resources. Secondly, the agency of the individual as a participant in social, economic and political development is often underestimated. A poor person can bring about change on her own accord in a legislative and institutional environment that is enabling and supportive.²⁶ Government agencies, using government or donor resources, can sustain and enhance the capabilities of poor individuals and groups and in this way support the expansion of the freedoms of the individual.

Sweden's Policy for Global Development

Sweden's Policy for Global Development is firmly based on the position that poverty is multidimensional, situation-specific and dynamic, and that poverty, and chances of escaping poverty, are strongly influenced by fac-

²⁶ The significance of a supportive legislative environment for poor peoples' prospects to move and stay out of poverty was the central theme for the international Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor. The Commission completed its work in 2008 and the findings and recommendations are available in the report of the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (2008).

tors such as sex, age, ethnic or other cultural origin, and where and how people earn a living. This position is the foundation for one of the two guiding principles underpinning the policy, i.e. that the situations, needs, conditions and priorities of poor women, men and children must guide and inform *all* efforts in *all* relevant areas of policy and political decision making (not only in development cooperation) aimed at reducing poverty or having an impact on developing countries and on the poor and marginalised citizens of those countries. The guiding principle is referred to as 'poor people's perspectives on development'. The other guiding and complementary principle is a rights perspective on development. It is based primarily on international human rights conventions, other international agreements and on the principles of democracy. While the rights perspective, which is shared by most donors today, is relatively straightforward, 'poor people's perspectives on development' is more open for interpretation and difficult to pursue. It calls for a radically different way of thinking about *what* poverty is all about, for *whom* and *how* best to support poverty reduction. Taking 'poor people's perspectives on poverty' as a point of departure implies that individuals are seen as subjects and actors – not as objects or passive recipients of external assistance. Hence, this is a far more comprehensive approach to poverty reduction than the approach underlying e.g. the Millennium Development Goals in which poor people are implicitly seen as objects of measures.

The Department for Development Policy where I work is in charge of the coordination of Sweden's Policy for Global Development. A colleague and I have a first-hand responsibility for each of the two guiding principles, in relation both to development cooperation and to all other relevant policy areas where decisions one way or the other can be expected to impact on the situations in developing countries. As principal 'guardians', we try to make use of every opportunity to further the recognition, understanding and application of the perspectives. A concrete example is the written instructions to Sida for the compilation of Country Strategies for bilateral development cooperation. Our mission is to make sure that Sida is instructed to critically assess the national poverty reduction strategy or plans (typically PRSPs – Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) and the results accomplished during the previous phase of bilateral cooperation with Sweden, in recognition of a rights perspective and the situations, needs, circumstances and priorities of citizens who are poor.

The analysis and assessment of national poverty reduction strategies and other documents is of the utmost importance in view of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). In line with the Declaration, it is partner country governments that carry the major responsibility for inter-

preting, assessing and bringing forward the problems, needs and interests of different categories of poor citizens, as a basis for national development efforts and also for directing external actors. In accordance with this division of responsibilities, donors are increasingly opting for budget and sector support. This improves the opportunities for partner countries to manage the development process based on their own priorities, structures, institutions and routines. But it also reduces to a minimum the options available for donors to obtain first-hand information on poverty situations and outcomes (e.g. through field-based poverty analysis) and on that basis to direct support to specific groups and locations (e.g. rural development projects, targeting poor and vulnerable individuals and groups). The current division of responsibilities is welcome, necessary and fair; but it also entails difficulties in pursuing the kind of policy objectives that put 'poor people's perspectives on development' in the forefront. The experiences to date of the extent to and ways in which partner country governments, as part of the preparations of national poverty reduction strategies and plans, are willing and have the capacity to involve the civil society (poor people and their legitimate representatives in particular) in problem identification and in the identification of measures to counteract poverty are not very positive. Hence, it is very important for Sida to bring up the rights perspective and 'poor people's perspectives on development' in the ongoing dialogue with partner country governments, agencies and institutions concerning the orientation and quality of our development cooperation.

Sida's policy department has come a long way in clarifying the meaning of the two perspectives in relation to development cooperation (e.g. Sida 2005; see also Sida 2006). Yet there is still a widespread conception that since poverty reduction has been the goal of Swedish development cooperation from the early 1960s, the new guiding principle does not require a change in approach or practice. It is also quite common to take the mere existence of a national poverty reduction strategy or plan as a sign of the partner government's recognition of problems and needs experienced by poor people. Furthermore, there is a tendency to associate 'poor people's perspectives on development' with the kind of small-scale, local and 'participatory' projects that nowadays are becoming increasingly rare (e.g. household water supply and sanitation projects based on community participation). It is often taken for granted that such projects, because they address fundamental livelihood needs and usually contain elements of local participation, are based on the priorities and meet the felt needs of poor women, men and children. In actual fact, such projects may contribute to promoting and cementing inequalities between differ-

ent interest and user groups in the community, in the case of e.g. privatisation of water sources that could previously be accessed by anybody.

While the understanding and recognition of the two guiding perspectives is relatively advanced in Sida, there is still a lot work to be done to firmly integrate them into the daily work of the Government Offices, and that includes other departments in our own ministry. Time is our worst enemy when we try to make use of all opportunities available to boost their recognition, understanding and application. The work includes scrutinising and commenting on numerous draft documents (e.g. Government Bills, Communications, Reports, etc.), instructions and positions that have been formulated in other policy areas, such as migration, trade and employment. In addition to forwarding our comments and suggestions, we also need to communicate with the colleagues concerned to make sure that we have reached a common understanding. The mere inclusion of a few sentences to highlight e.g. ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’, or a rights perspective, is not enough – it is merely a transmission of policy language. The real impact of our efforts is usually beyond our power and capacity to influence. In spite of the fact that Sweden’s Policy for Global Development is a policy for a holistic and *coherent* approach to poverty reduction and development, individual areas of policy and political decision making tend to look upon their own goals as of primary significance, even when they may counteract the overarching policy goal of contributing to equitable and sustainable global development.

There are at least three common misconceptions of ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in the Government Offices that have proved exceedingly difficult to put right. The first is that this guiding principle has relevance only for development cooperation (‘projects for the poor’), and hence ministries and departments dealing with the environment, migration, peace and security, trade, social policy, etc. may feel that this is not their concern. The second misconception is that this principle is synonymous with ‘poverty reduction’ in the more conventional meaning of the term (i.e. ‘doing things for the poor’). The third, and related, mistaken belief is that anything that is held to be beneficial for a developing country at the national level will automatically benefit its poor and vulnerable citizens. We have used the latter misconception as a starting point in our efforts to make colleagues in other policy areas aware of the need to ask questions about the possible implications beyond the national level. In the worst scenario, national growth (often taken as synonymous with development) can take place at the expense of the chances of poor and marginalised women, men and young people to improve their situations.

The increased participation of a developing country in international trade can benefit poor people if the goods and crops exported and imported are of concern to them and within their reach. If national growth depends on the export of goods and crops that put poor people at risk (e.g. mining under dangerous, poorly paid and discriminatory working conditions, or crops requiring chemical treatment that may cause health hazards to farmers who cannot afford to protect themselves), the growth can make the situation worse for people who are already poor and vulnerable.

The level of ambition in advocating the two perspectives has to be reasonable and realistic. There is obviously no way that an employee in the Government Offices, or in Sida for that matter, can have an informed knowledge of how different categories of poor people in different concrete situations experience poverty and are likely to be affected by various decisions. For Sida – and under current forms of development cooperation – this is the kind of knowledge that we must expect to be available in partner country institutions and agencies, to be used in assessments of the poverty situation in the country and as a basis for national development planning. For staff in the Government Offices, with the exception of the geographical departments of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, direct encounters with developing countries are almost non-existent. Taking ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ into account must therefore in practice in the context of the Swedish policy be understood metaphorically, as an attitude and approach to assessing the implications of decisions and to entering into dialogue with partner governments and institutions regarding what is needed to improve the lives of poor people as they themselves see it, based on their own analysis of the problems and taking into account the resources at their disposal.

Our strategy is therefore to promote a more reflective attitude based on the two perspectives. Thus, we want colleagues in other areas of the Government Offices, such as trade and the environment, instead of merely assuming that a decision is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ from a poverty reduction and human rights point of view, to reflect on the possible short- and long-term implications of decisions and measures proposed or taken, for different categories of individuals and groups that are poor and marginalised, under different circumstances and in different environments. Our aim is to encourage them to pose at least two questions as a matter of routine. First, to what extent has a specific decision or measure been informed by a rights perspective and by the situations, needs, conditions and priorities experienced by poor women, men and children? Secondly, can the decision or measure taken be expected to promote the two perspectives? A response to the first question may be that the decision to facilitate interna-

tional trade of specific agricultural products has been based on fact-finding and assessment of the specific implications for female farmers. The second question may be answered in terms of the expected impact of a decision in the area of stability and peace, on the respect for human rights and principles of democracy. Even when there are no straightforward answers to these and other questions, the fact that they are raised helps to increase the awareness about the need to consider the complexity of poverty and vulnerability, including the need to improve the knowledge base through making use of research findings.

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have provided a concrete example to show how poverty is perceived and dealt with by people who experience poverty – in this case a group of seaweed-growing women in Zanzibar. I have used this example of genuine, multidimensional perceptions and experiences of poverty as a point of reference for reflecting on the underlying assumptions and understanding of the meaning of ‘poverty’ and of ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in the policy context of the governments of Zanzibar and Sweden. This is similar to the approach of Shore and Wright (1997), who point to the significance of grasping the connections, interactions and disjunctions between different levels in the policy process. It is regrettable that my material does not allow for an inquiry into more genuine policy connections between the different levels in the policy context, i.e. the everyday life and approaches to poverty situations in Jambiani on the one hand, and the policies for poverty reduction formulated and pursued by the governments of Zanzibar and Sweden on the other. Sweden is a peripheral actor in Zanzibar and hence the Swedish policy has not been put to a test here. Also, I have not inquired specifically into the participation of Jambiani villagers in the consultations in the preparation of the national poverty reduction plan, nor have I looked into the national government’s interventions to help reduce poverty in Jambiani. However, in spite of these shortcomings I hope that the material presented here can help to further the understanding of the importance of tracing policy connections between different levels and contexts.

This paper is also a personal account of experiences of working with development policy in the Swedish government. I have briefly outlined the main trails in my professional development in which I have combined research with applied anthropology of various kinds and orientations, from short-term consultancies for Sida and other development coopera-

tion agencies and focusing on field-based projects and programmes as well as the development of methods for participatory development, to global development policy in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Although my responsibilities as well as concrete tasks have varied a lot over the years, and even if ‘anthropologist’ and ‘anthropology’ have only exceptionally been key words in my assignments, I have throughout maintained my professional identity as an anthropologist and I regard my anthropological experiences from fieldwork, analysis of field material and literature studies as the fundamental basis for my current competence.

In this connection, I would like to stress that the opportunity I have had for the past seven years, i.e. to continue with the research in Zanzibar while working with development policy in the Swedish government, has been immensely rewarding. My responsibility to make intelligible and promote the rather abstract notion of ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in relation to various ministries and departments within the Government Offices bears no direct connection to the research in Zanzibar or to my previous research undertakings and consultancies in East Africa. Yet the experiences gained from research and consultancies amount to an invaluable source of inspiration and a constant reminder of the multiple meanings and complex manifestations of poverty and development. These experiences serve as a point of reference – a kind of sounding-board – against which the abstract notions of development policy, such as ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’, ‘equity’ and ‘social inclusion’, can be assessed and endowed with meaning. My experiences constitute a platform from which I feel I am able to speak and act with confidence. I would also like to stress here that my research in Zanzibar has benefited from my responsibilities in the ministry. For the past four years I have been responsible for ‘migration and development’ as a policy area of significance both to development cooperation and to the goal of policy coherence, which is a shared responsibility of the government as a whole. Hence, I work closely with colleagues in the Ministry for Justice and Legal Affairs in which Sweden’s migration policy is formulated and implemented. My responsibility is to provide advice and support with regard to the development dimension of international migration. My involvement in migration and development policy at home has also served as an eye-opener for migration-related issues and processes in Jambiani that I had not been sensitive to before I got into the ‘technicalities’ of migration. One example is remittances. Although international migration is so far not a marked feature of life in rural Zanzibar, it is prominent in the minds of many young people, young men in particular, who dream of a better future than what the islands can offer. In the policy language, remittances

are invariably held to promote development in the migrants' countries of origin. My experience from Zanzibar shows that the contrary might in fact also be true, i.e. remittances can serve to hold back development. I have met several young men in Jambiani and in other parts of Zanzibar who choose not to complete schooling or to try to find a job. For the time being, they manage to get by on money sent home by relatives who live abroad.

Based on more than thirty years of experience of research and development consultancies in East Africa, twenty years of which were also devoted to promoting the involvement of anthropologists in Swedish development cooperation through a university-based agreement of collaboration with Sida, I can provide many examples to show that the involvement of anthropologists in development cooperation has made a significant difference. This was obvious at the time when anthropologists contributed their experiences and knowledge to field projects located in areas where they had been or were engaged in research. It was less obvious during the gradual shift away from field projects towards a preoccupation with policy and management aspects of development cooperation. Quite a number of anthropologists lost their interest in development cooperation when the shift became apparent. Others tried but proved less able to take a step forward from the kind of more extensive, field-oriented consultancies where their contribution would be writing ethnography, to participating in multidisciplinary teams that would take on more technical and managerial tasks, such as monitoring and evaluation, and would also work within tight time frames. Anthropologists who had been met with interest and appreciation when they contributed their ethnographic expertise to field-based projects were sometimes shocked to find that social scientists were in a minority in multidisciplinary teams, and many experienced that they fought a losing battle in pursuing their perspectives. Yet other anthropologists accepted the challenge and developed both the interest and skills needed to deal with new tasks in the field of policy, in formulating indicators to measure and monitor social and economic change, in using 'rapid appraisal' techniques and in compiling 'how to' manuals, check-lists, etc. that could be used as short-cuts by project staff and development planners to assess problems and progress in bilateral development cooperation. In fact, these new tasks did not call for another sort of basic anthropological competence – the informed understanding of the kind of realities experienced by individuals and groups who were poor was still primary. However, the new tasks required that the anthropologists familiarised themselves with the management aspects of development cooperation, with the policy environment and with teamwork under time

constraints. Also, the fact that anthropologists who worked in or close to donor-country aid agencies in the north only had limited contacts with field-based projects and programmes, made it increasingly important for them to join forces and form alliances with anthropologists and other social scientists in the south, in order to have an impact.

Anthropologists have a combination of skills that make them very useful in applied development as well as in policy work. First, the experiences from fieldwork, preferably long-term, in different locations and focusing on different aspects of social, economic and political life (including inter-connections between local and external factors and processes of change), constitute the very basis for our competence. Although the ethnographic experience and evidence is specific, the anthropologist who has experienced the richness and diversity of human existence, including the variety and dynamics of local situations and processes of change, is able to draw on this experience to shed light on the interconnectedness of social, economic and political life in other situations. Anthropologists tend to focus on features that are basic in social life, such as formal and informal power relations and differential access to resources, and the findings and insights therefore have relevance far beyond specific locations. While in the conventional development rhetoric, poor people are depicted as victims who need assistance, anthropologists are able to show that women and men, even if they have very limited resources, have agency and should be seen as subjects and actors who are able to shape their own development.

Gardner and Lewis declare that ‘anthropologists are trained to see beyond the immediate formal relationships that might exist [and] they often probe beyond what is immediately apparent’ (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 159). This brings me to a second, related, skill of the anthropologist, i.e. to pose relevant and crucial questions. Anthropologists who have carried out extensive periods of fieldwork, preferably in different contexts, and who follow the literature and debates on features of development in specific countries and regions, are well equipped to ask informed and pertinent questions about the nature of poverty, and they can assess the likely consequences of various decisions and measures for individuals and groups who experience poverty. Through raising issues and posing questions (without necessarily having or providing the answers), anthropologists can contribute to making individuals and groups who experience poverty more ‘visible’. This in turn can help policy makers and planners as well as researchers from other disciplines to move from generalised *assumptions* and preconceived ideas about e.g. poverty-related cause and effect relationships, towards a more reflective approach and an improved

understanding of the complexity and dynamics of poverty, and hence a better basis for informed decisions and actions.

A word on the importance of a supportive environment for the anthropologist involved in practical development cooperation and in development policy: Anthropologists who work for or inside development cooperation agencies and government departments dealing with development policy need to form alliances with other professionals who would share the fundamentals of the anthropologists' perspectives and concerns. As anthropologists, we can help in creating such an environment in places where we work, through using the opportunities at hand to promote an attitude and an outlook that encourages others to consider alternative points of view and move beyond what is immediately apparent. Our work in the Government Offices, to make our colleagues sensitive to the complexity of poverty and to the multiple 'perspectives' that people who experience poverty might have on their situations and opportunities, is an example of this. As anthropologists seeking to pursue our perspectives and objectives, we can also obtain vital support from agency staff who have experienced direct encounters with poor and marginalised individuals and groups in local situations in developing countries, however brief and superficial these visits might have been. These so called 'immersions' are nowadays organised by several bilateral and multilateral donor agencies (e.g. the World Bank and Sida), for professionals who are committed to poverty reduction and injustice, but who lack opportunities for direct learning about the lives and conditions experienced by people who are poor.²⁷ The mere exposure to the situations and problems of poor people and communities has proved to be a valuable basis for reflecting and for posing more relevant questions in relation to the daily work and hence the possibility that the anthropologists can gain new allies.

Finally, anthropologists and policy makers have to find ways of interacting and sharing perspectives, information and experience, such as the conference that formed the basis of this publication. The dialogue presupposes that policy makers are prepared to engage with and listen to the anthropologists. It also presupposes that the anthropologists are familiar with the policy environment and language so that their observations and findings can be presented and communicated in ways that policy makers find relevant and useful.

²⁷ A comprehensive description of 'immersions' as a form of experimental learning is available in Irvine et al. (2004).

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