The Fourth Afrasian International Symposium of Ryukoku University

The Question of Poverty and Development in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

15 (Sat.)-16 (Sun.) November 2008

The Framework of the Symposium

"Poverty" in a Historical Perspective

Toward the end of the 18th century, poverty, a long-standing religious concern, became a philosophical and social-policy concern as well in Europe and America, as the West had experienced scientific progress, Industrial Revolution, and American and French Revolutions, which in combination promised the historically unprecedented broadening of economic and political equality in society. This concern was eventually extended to the non-western world in the latter half of the nineteenth century and especially in the early twentieth century; western colonial powers began to feel obliged to justify colonialism in terms of "paternalistic" and sometimes "developmental" intervention in order to reduce poverty and uplift the socio-economic well-being of the colonized peoples as part of the "civilization mission."

After the end of World War Two, poverty turned into a geopolitical concern which basically circumvented the question of the colonizer-colonized or exploiter-exploited relations. The disparity between the poor vs. rich, underdeveloped vs. developed countries was problematised, because "[m]ore than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery" and "[t]heir poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas", therefore "[o]ur [American] aim should be to help the free peoples of the world," specifically through "a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing" ('Point Four' in the U.S. presidential inaugural speech of Harry Truman in January of 1949). Poverty was deemed problematic since it might push free peoples of the world into the embrace of socialism, thus threatening the security of "more prosperous areas." Soon thereafter ensued the competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in offering international development aid to the "Third World" countries, which was fueled by the Cold War.

Upon the official ending of the Cold War in 1989, poverty was yet to become another kind of concern, that is, a universal human concern as indicated by the term "human security." Human security encompasses "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" for all persons, and it is construed to be closely tied in with global security. Accordingly one of the major efforts by the UN in the new century is directed to the attainment of Eight Millennium Development Goals, one of which is the eradication of extreme

poverty and hunger. In a way poverty has become a common "enemy" against which all the nations of the world can agree to cooperate and fight.

Introducing the Symposium

Sharing this broad and admittedly somewhat oversimplified historical backdrop revolving around the shifting conceptualization of poverty, we will focus in this international symposium on some of the issues related to poverty and development, and discuss how they might interact with conflict and conflict resolution. Let me explain briefly what kinds of issues might be brought up in the respective sessions of the symposium which brings together academicians and activists with rich field experiences in three major areas of Afrasia, namely, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa.

In Keynote Speeches one of the speakers tries to reexamine the validity of the westernized conceptualization of poverty and its associated prescription for poverty reduction, and the other to pose the question of whether the rising agricultural and energy production, made possible by the modern technologies of the Green Revolution, GM (genetically modified) crops, and bio-fuel as an alternative energy source, which in many ways epitomizes the essence of development, has reduced conflict. These are two key questions we should keep in mind throughout the symposium.

It is often argued that "traditional societies" have a built-in safety net to soften the hardship of poverty and reduce conflict. Session 1 "Local Knowledge of Sustenance and Challenges of Development" discusses what happens to such a safety net when society faces challenges of development.

In contrast to local knowledge or local wisdom of sustenance which is supposed to provide a historically-constructed and autochthonous safety net, poverty reduction is sometimes adopted as an explicit policy objective for resolving conflict or promoting peace-building in a post-conflict political settlement; poverty or the economic disparity between different segments of society is commonly thought to be a major factor in the germination and outbreak of conflict. This is the topic three speakers will address in Session 2 "Situating Poverty in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building."

While Sessions 1 and 2 of "Panel I Poverty and Dynamics of Conflict Management" focus on the mechanism of conflict management in connection with poverty or economic disparity, Sessions 3 and 4 of "Panel II Rural Community as an Arena of

Development and Conflict" pay attention to circumstances under which conflict tends to emerge or erupt, notably in the implementation process of government-induced or government-sanctioned development projects.

Who controls local resources, especially commons, often becomes a bitterly fought-out issue between state and community in many parts of the world, since development projects are often introduced into a local setting under the dictate of the national or local governments (sometimes with the recommendation of international financial institutions). We will hear what the three speakers have to say on this question in Session 3 "Community vs. State: Who Controls Local Resources and for What?".

Of all the economically and politically deprived peoples of the world, "indigenous people" are probably one of those who suffer the most, particularly in the process of development. Although they are seldom politically well endowed, they do not necessarily remain silent. The three speakers in Session 4 "Development Agenda and Indigenous Peoples at the Margins" will talk about how indigenous people strive, and oftentimes have to fight, to regain their dignity as well as their claims over natural resources against the encroachment of their life world by the powers that be and their business allies.

In Concluding Panel three speakers, i.e., two academicians and one activist, address the question of why we should care about other people's development and, if so, in what way. It is a seemingly innocuous and simplistic question, yet proves to be an important one on closer scrutiny. For, partly due to the contemporary currency of libertarian thinking and partly due to the uncertain efficacy of past development aid, a serious question is raised in certain quarters of the world about the wisdom of aid, this being the case even among the aid-receiving countries. For example, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda reportedly said recently, "In the last 50 years, you[donor countries]'ve spent $400 billion in aid to Africa" but "what is there to show for it?".

Obviously there will be no simple answer to this "innocuous" question. For that matter, there will be no simple answer either to the initial question of how poverty and development might interact with conflict and conflict resolution. I hope that through the Afrasian international symposium and, above all, through the final Roundtable Discussion, we will at least be able to deepen our appreciation of the complexity and enormity of the issues we tackle and possibly to see a direction or directions in expounding them.

Tsuyoshi Kato (Program Chair of the Symposium)