

**JRF programme paper:
Globalisation**

The impact of global governance on poverty in the UK

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This paper:

- classifies global governance institutions;
- examines how these institutions have contributed to the production and/or the alleviation of poverty in the UK; and
- outlines how anti-poverty campaigners in the UK can engage with global governance institutions.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) commissioned this paper as part of its programme on Globalisation, which explores and promotes awareness of the impacts of globalisation on the UK and focuses particularly on communities and people in poverty

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Introduction

People with experience of poverty are today situated in a more global world. The contemporary dynamics of impoverishment – and efforts to counter it – are not contained within territorial units, but also prominently involve social relations on a planetary scale. The causes of contemporary poverty in the UK are partly global; consequently, effective policies for poverty alleviation in the UK need to incorporate a global dimension, too.

This paper examines the impacts of global governance on poverty in the UK. Public policy today – including as it relates to poverty – involves many rules and regulatory processes that operate globally. Thus any successful anti-poverty strategy for the present decade and beyond needs: (a) to map the relevant global regulatory arrangements that impact the UK; (b) to understand how these global policy apparatuses shape poverty in the UK, positively and/or negatively; and (c) to consider how poverty activists in the UK might access and influence this global governance.

The paper first sets out a six-fold taxonomy of global governance institutions. The second section elaborates on the three general ways that current workings of global governance have contributed to the production of poverty in the UK. The third section elaborates on the four broad ways that global governance has exerted countervailing forces against impoverishment in the UK. The conclusion offers suggestions how anti-poverty campaigners might use this knowledge in their work.

Global governance

'Governance' is a word that has gained increased currency in political studies since the 1990s as a generic term that covers all systems of rules and regulatory institutions. 'Governance' has a wider scope than 'government', to reflect the fact that a number of actors in addition to states have in recent history acquired regulatory roles in society (Scholte, 2005: ch 6). For example, many societal rules are now administered through supra-state official bodies such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). In addition, the broader range of regulatory actors today extends beyond the public sector to include various market-based agencies (such as the International Accounting Standards Board, IASB) and some civil society organisations (such as the Forestry Stewardship Council, FSC). Thus while governance in today's world most certainly includes national and local governments, multiple other regulatory apparatuses are also active, including with regard to poverty.

'Global governance' refers here to systems of rules and regulatory processes that apply across the planet. Many societal norms, standards and laws today relate to people and places spread over the globe. True, global governance arrangements are only rarely completely universal, in the sense of touching every human being at every location on earth. However, global regimes do apply across multiple continents and/or to so-called 'global commons' such as the seas and the skies. Global rules are also often administered through global regulatory institutions, that is, governance bodies such as the UN and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) whose jurisdiction covers much – if not all – of the earth.

Note that global governance does not entail a world state, on the model of a nation state writ large. As current circumstances show, it is quite possible to have substantial rules and regulatory institutions that operate on a planetary scale without bringing those arrangements together in a unitary, centralised, sovereign apparatus. Instead, present-day global governance is dispersed across many often only loosely connected sites, none of which holds primacy over the others (even if the UN has sometimes aspired to such a pre-eminent position).

Note also that global governance does not entail an end of the nation state. Certain rash claims of the 1990s regarding a purported decline of the state in the face of globalisation (e.g., Ohmae, 1995; Strange, 1996) have long been effectively countered (e.g., Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Weiss, 1998). The state plainly still figures prominently in the construction of social protection and other policies relevant to poverty (Garrett, 1998; Yeates, 2001). So the question is not global governance *versus* the state, but global governance *and* the state.

Today's global governance institutions take multiple constitutional forms. Some global governance agencies are *intergovernmental organisations*, that is, formal bodies based on state membership. Others are *transgovernmental networks*, that is, informal arrangements of global collaboration amongst national regulators. Some are *interregional apparatuses* that bring together officials from different macro-regional units such as Europe and Asia. Others are *translocal arrangements* that assemble sub-state authorities (e.g. provinces and municipalities) from various continents. Still

other global governance bodies are, as mentioned already, *private regulatory mechanisms* in which commercial or civil society actors formulate and administer rules. And some are *transsectoral constructions* (also called multi-stakeholder forums) that combine elements from official and non-official circles. Thus global governance has evolved over recent decades to encompass several novel forms in addition to traditional 'international organisations'. As is illustrated in the next paragraphs, all of these six institutional types can be relevant to experiences of, and policy responses to, poverty in the UK.

Intergovernmental organisations tend to remain the best-known type of global governance arrangement, and many have direct relevance to social policy (Deacon *et al.*, 2004). These institutions include household names such as the UN and its specialised agencies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). The IMF monitors the UK government *inter alia* on fiscal conditions relevant to social policy in its annual Article IV surveillance of macroeconomic conditions in the country. The WHO advises the UK government on epidemiological matters, including the recent recommendation for mass inoculation against swine flu. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) monitors child poverty across the world, including in the UK (UNICEF, 2007). The importance of the UN human rights machinery for anti-poverty campaigns is detailed in a later section of this paper.

Outside the UN system, other global intergovernmental organisations with implications for the generation and/or alleviation of poverty include: the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Commonwealth, and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS). Global trade law through the WTO deeply affects patterns of competitiveness in the world economy, with major consequences for (un)employment prospects in the UK. The BIS and associated committees set banking standards and other financial rules that affect the access to bank accounts and credit lines for the UK poor. The Commonwealth mainly addresses poverty in the global south, but in principle its biennial People's Forum offers a venue for groups working with the UK poor to meet counterparts from around the world. Although the UK government is not a member of the OIC, that organisation declares itself to be concerned with the well-being of Muslims anywhere on the planet, so including in the UK.

Transgovernmental networks are generally less visible than intergovernmental bodies, but arguably these informal collaborations among senior state officials have on the whole become more influential than old-style intergovernmentalism (Slaughter, 2004). Perhaps the most familiar instances of transgovernmentalism (both with UK membership) are the Group of Eight (G8) and its recently developed close relation, the Group of Twenty (G20). Both of these bodies (their summits as well as their working groups) coordinate a host of economic and social policies with implications for poverty in the UK. Many other transgovernmental relations occur through the 250 committees, working groups and expert bodies convened by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Mahon and McBride, 2008). The OECD gatherings with particular relevance to poverty issues (and attended by UK officials) include the Economic Policy Committee and the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee.

Unfortunately no systematic research has yet been done on the transgovernmental relations of UK departments beyond an isolated general analysis (cf. Rhodes, 1990). In particular, the specific implications of such policy-making for poverty remain to be investigated. However, casual observation suggests that many, if not most, social ministries in the UK government today pursue transgovernmental links as part of their policy processes. For example, the Government Actuary's Department (adviser to the Department for Work and Pensions) links with corresponding offices in 147 other countries through the International Social Security Association in order to share research results, databases, policy analysis and good practices (ISSA, 2010). The UK Border Agency maintains memoranda of understanding with equivalent bodies in other states in order to coordinate monitoring of transboundary migration. One surmises that the Department of Health (DH), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) – all with a role in poverty alleviation – are also involved in transgovernmental networks that cover their respective agendas, although again the relevant research remains to be done.

Whereas transgovernmental networks are already well embedded today, global governance through interregionalism is more incipient. In this vein the EU (of which the UK is a member) has since the 1980s developed collaborations with the Andean Community, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). In an instance more specifically relevant to poverty questions, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has convened interregional conferences of labour and employment ministers in 2006 and 2008. ASEM has, in recent years, also organised interregional dialogues on migration and on the welfare of women and children. Interregionalism is a trend to watch for the future, as the EU grows in importance for social policy in the UK, and as EU relations with other regional units may develop a larger social dimension.

Like interregionalism, global governance through translocal networks is in early phases of development, although some instances of global links between local councils date back to the early twentieth century. The most prominent example today is United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), whose members from the UK include the Local Government Association (LGA, covering England and Wales) and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). UCLG addresses matters relevant to poverty *inter alia* in its Committee on Social Inclusion and Participative Democracy and its Committee on Gender Equality, each of which include two members from UK local authorities. Several UK mayors and local councillors also sit on the UCLG World Council and its Executive Bureau. Town twinning is another mode of translocalism where strategies of poverty reduction can be advanced, for instance, through the exchange of experiences on social policies. Local (also called 'complementary') currency schemes with the aim of advancing an egalitarian solidarity economy have also pursued some global connections amongst themselves (CC Database, 2010). Local authorities and civil society groups have also built some global networks in respect of participatory budgets as a mechanism for citizen empowerment.

Although common conception tends to associate governance with the public sector, private-sector mechanisms can also fulfil regulatory functions, as the example of

local currency schemes just given illustrates. Already in the Middle Ages, for example, *lex mercatoria* ('the law of merchants') governed transactions between traders across Europe, without the involvement of feudal rulers. Today much global governance of finance occurs through industry-based bodies such as the Wolfsberg Group (to combat money laundering) and the Hedge Funds Standards Board (HFSB), as well as more informally through the major credit rating agencies. Non-official schemes for corporate social responsibility (CSR) have proliferated over the past two decades and often address poverty-related issues such as child labour and workplace safety. CSR initiatives can connect global business actors such as British Petroleum, Marks & Spencer, and McDonald's to poverty alleviation locally. Meanwhile Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) and the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) uphold standards to ensure that designated commercial arrangements do indeed bring greater returns to poor producers in the global south. Many of these private global governance mechanisms involve market or civil society players in the UK.

Finally among the six types of global governance distinguished here are transsectoral regimes. One long-standing example is the International Labour Organisation (ILO), with its tripartite structure of governments, employer federations and trade unions. Another is the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which brings together commercial associations, professional societies, government agencies, universities and individuals. Transsectoral constructions have recently multiplied under the label of multi-stakeholder forums. One prominent example, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), has a governing board composed of representatives of governments, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), business, foundations, and people living with the diseases. Further new additions include the World Water Council and the Global Partnership for Disability and Development. Again, many of these transsectoral bodies involve actors from the UK, and some like the ILO (with its directives on employment and labour protection) have direct bearing on poverty in the UK.

Considering these multiple forms of transplanetary regulation in sum, it becomes clear that global governance is quite a substantial phenomenon in contemporary society. Now every public policy issue – including poverty alleviation – is handled partly with global rules and global regulatory institutions. Thus an adequate understanding of, and an effective strategy against, poverty in the UK today must include careful consideration of global governance. It is somewhat surprising that the basic mapping exercise undertaken in the preceding paragraphs has not been done before.

Global governance and the production of UK poverty

As various examples above have already indicated, a broad range of global governance arrangements can have implications for poverty in the UK. However, rather than document these impacts institution by institution it is analytically more effective to highlight several general ways that global regulatory processes have been involved in the dynamics of impoverishment in the UK. The approach taken here is therefore to identify broad themes and then to illustrate how different global governance agencies have exerted each type of influence.

It should be stressed from the outset that contemporary global governance has a complex relationship to UK poverty. In some ways, as discussed in the following paragraphs, global regulatory arrangements can help to produce and perpetuate poverty in the UK. In other ways, as noted in the next section of the paper, global rules can contribute to poverty reduction in the UK. Given this complexity of impacts it is not helpful to issue either a blanket celebration or a total condemnation of global governance with regard to poverty. The growth of global spaces – and of global regulation of those spaces – is not inherently beneficial or harmful in respect of poverty, whether in the UK or elsewhere. The effects can go either or both ways, depending on the nature of the policies that institutions pursue.

Certainly global governance has had several general downsides for UK poverty in contemporary times. Three such negative consequences are: (a) the problem of omission; (b) the problem of marginalisation; and (c) the problem of neo-liberal policy frames. These impacts are elaborated in turn below.

Omission

The problem of omission refers here to the tendency in much of global governance to approach poverty as a concern of the global south, thereby relatively neglecting poverty elsewhere such as the UK. Indeed, the prevailing vocabulary in global policy circles characterises the UK as a ‘rich country’, thereby tending to render invisible the poor in these islands. To be sure, it is in many ways understandable that the World Bank, UNICEF and the Commonwealth have concentrated their efforts on so-called ‘least developed countries’ where poverty runs deeper and local resources to combat it are more limited. However, this focus on the ‘third world’ has often gone so far that global governance institutions underplay, if not completely ignore, poverty in so-called ‘advanced economies’ such as the UK.

With this general oversight UK governments have not faced the sorts of pressures to tackle poverty issues that many global regulatory bodies have insistently put on governments in the south. Thus urgings of the UN Development Decades from the 1960s to the 1990s and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) since 2000 have not applied to social policy in the UK. Likewise, the G8 has addressed poverty as an issue for the ‘developing countries’ rather than as a problem for its own member states. The IMF, too, has seen poverty reduction as a priority in low-income countries and not as a headline subject for its Article IV consultations in the UK. With

this diversion of attention, global governance bodies have in effect let governments of the global north (including the UK) off the hook concerning their domestic poverty. An exception to this overall pattern is UNICEF with its aforementioned critiques of childhood poverty in the UK and other 'rich countries' (UNICEF, 2007).

Campaigners against UK poverty have tended to be complicit in this omission inasmuch as their advocacy has given global governance limited attention. True, development NGOs working out of the UK have often lobbied global regulatory agencies on poverty issues, but with a focus on the global south rather than their home country. Meanwhile, groups that combat poverty in the UK have rarely taken their advocacy beyond ministries in London, although some might occasionally engage regionally with the EU through initiatives such as the European Anti-Poverty Network. Global governance has generally been a blind spot for UK poverty activists, in spite of its potential benefits to their cause.

Illustrating this neglect of global governance, NGOs dealing with social welfare in the UK have generally not pursued consultative status at the UN. The few exceptions include Help the Aged, the International Network of Street Papers, and the Salvation Army (UNDESA, 2010). Consultative status allows attendance of, and sometimes also speaking rights at, a broad range of UN meetings including committees concerned with economic and social affairs. Some NGOs have (via these channels) affected the texts of UN resolutions and recommendations as well as the execution of some UN programmes with relevance to poverty. Likewise, few civil society advocates for the UK poor have participated in ad hoc UN conferences concerned with poverty issues, such as the World Summit for Social Development, its sequels, and the social watch reports that have monitored implementation of summit action plans since the mid-1990s. Civil society accreditation is also available at meetings of the Commonwealth, the IMF, the OECD and the WTO.

Nor have campaigns against poverty in the UK built strong coalitions with anti-poverty groups in 'less developed' world regions. Such alliances might engage global governance institutions as a collective north-south force. A number of UK-based groups have participated in the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), but again this activity has focused almost entirely on poverty in the global south. GCAP could also be connected more with impoverishment within the UK itself and link the struggles of people living with poverty north and south. Similar comments apply to the Global Campaign for Education (GCE). The UK poor could also increase links with global self-help networks such as the International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI), StreetNet International, and Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

Marginalisation

The expansion of global governance in recent history has also reinforced poverty in the UK to the extent that poor people have had little access to, or influence in, most transplanetary regulatory agencies. It is harder to advance one's cause when one lacks entry to sites of power, and most global governance bodies are currently largely closed to poor people, both in the UK and elsewhere.

In a sense these democratic deficits have put back the historical clock for anti-poverty movements. Similar exclusions once faced the poor in relation to the nation state, but long struggles by trade unions, cooperative associations and others had by the middle of the twentieth century given impoverished groups more say in the UK government. The state responded with a raft of redistributive social legislation that substantially alleviated poverty in the UK. Now the rise of elite-dominated global governance in recent decades has tipped the scales back once again towards greater political marginalisation of poor people.

Global governance institutions as they are constructed today generally offer few channels of participation for the poor. In contrast to nation-states, transplanetary regulatory bodies lack a popularly elected legislative arm where the poor might find representation. Instead, intergovernmental organisations are bastions of diplomats who are far removed from – and have only the thinnest accountability to – impoverished people. Similarly, transgovernmental networks are usually closed shops of technocrats who have no interchange of note with poor constituents (Slaughter, 2004: ch 6). Meanwhile, most private global governance is invisible as well as inaccessible to the poor and their advocates in faith-based groups, NGOs, trade unions and other social movements.

True, many global regulatory organisations have in recent decades opened certain channels for the consultation of civil society associations (Scholte, 2011). The World Bank and the IMF have since 1999 promoted Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) whose preparation often involves considerable inputs from civil society organisations. However, anti-poverty groups in ‘developed countries’ such as the UK have acquired few opportunities for substantive involvement in global policy-making. Moreover, apart from the World Bank (which has little relevance to UK poverty), most global governance bodies have allocated few staff and funds for civil society liaison. On their side, most campaigners against UK poverty have lacked the resources to conduct meaningful sustained engagement of global regulatory agencies. Hence it has been exceptional that, for example, ATD Fourth World has facilitated the participation of poor persons from the UK to give testimony at the UN (ATD Fourth World, 2009: 3). Instead, global governance consultation of civil society has mainly involved business associations, think tanks and large professional NGOs. Hence, while welcome in principle, initiatives for civil society engagement in global regulation have in practice done little so far to close accountability gaps vis-à-vis poor people in the UK.

Neo-liberalism

When global governance involves little voice or influence for the poor, the resulting rules are less likely to work against poverty alleviation and may on the contrary actually exacerbate it. Many critics have issued such a charge against the neo-liberalist policy framework that dominated in global regulation during the late twentieth century and continues to linger in recent years. Indeed, the strength of the paradigm has been such that many commentators have equated ‘globalisation’ with ‘liberalisation’, as though the two were the same thing, and as though neo-liberalist principles are the only way to govern a more global world.

In brief, neo-liberalism is a policy formula that prescribes globalisation by *laissez-faire* marketisation (Robison, 2006). This perspective tends to define society (and poverty within society) in wholly economic terms. As the optimal approach to economy neo-liberalism prescribes free-market capitalism, a societal order that will allegedly not only end poverty, but also advance democracy, liberty and peace. To move towards this good society, neo-liberalism urges liberalisation (the removal of statutory barriers to cross-border transactions), deregulation (the annulment of legal measures that constrain market capitalist initiative), and privatisation (the transfer of publicly held assets to private ownership). In addition, the neo-liberalist framework emphasises fiscal constraint to limit public sector expenditure and tight monetary policy to avoid inflation.

Global governance agencies played a pivotal role in the generation and spread of neo-liberalist policy discourses during the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, it was common in the late twentieth century to speak of a so-called 'Washington Consensus' on the need for *laissez faire* in the globalising economy (Williamson, 1990). 'Washington' here referred to the location of IMF and World Bank headquarters as well as the seat of the US Government. Not only the Bretton Woods institutions, but also the G8 and the OECD strongly promoted neo-liberalist policies at this time. By the 1990s much UN activity in the area of economic and social policy had also taken a neo-liberal turn. This reorientation was illustrated most starkly in the conversion of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) from a promoter of Keynesian global reform to a champion of liberalisation, particularly of cross-border investment. The rise of private mechanisms for global economic governance in the late twentieth century further embraced the principle of market-centred development.

Of course, national governments in the UK at this time were also of a strong neo-liberalist bent and hardly needed persuasion from global governance agencies to adopt this policy frame. In fact the Thatcher and Major Governments used their positions in intergovernmental and transgovernmental forums to promote neo-liberalism in the wider world. Still, support from global economic regimes reinforced the power of neo-liberalism in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s and also made it more difficult for UK policy-makers to turn away from that course after the change of ruling party in 1997. 'New Labour' also arguably remained under strong neo-liberalist influences in part owing to the resilience of this paradigm in key global governance circles where national governments are socialised into global norms.

The implications of neo-liberalism for poverty are much contested. Advocates of the approach affirm that it minimises poverty and maximises aggregate prosperity. For supporters of neo-liberalism, 'free' markets boost efficiency and output, generating high economic growth that sooner or later raises the welfare of all, including the poor. In contrast, opponents of *laissez faire* charge that neo-liberalism is an ideology of the strong that in practice exacerbates poverty and widens inequalities between rich and poor. In the eyes of critics, liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation transfer power and resources to propertied classes. At the same time fiscal constraint reduces social protections, and tight monetary policy disproportionately favours people with finance capital (whereas deficit spending with mild inflationary effects could be used to expand social programmes and associated poverty reduction).

This short paper is not the place for a full dissection of evidence relevant to the consequences of neo-liberalism for poverty in the UK. Certainly incontestable is the persistence of considerable impoverishment in the country over the past 30 years while neo-liberalist principles have prevailed. In particular, UK poverty has continued in areas of mining and old industry that have struggled to achieve 'competitiveness' in a more 'open' global economy. Meanwhile, as in most other countries that have adopted neo-liberalist policies, income and asset inequalities have grown in the UK since the 1970s (Cornia and Court, 2001). The polarisation is particularly stark in London, where enormous stocks of globally mobile capital sit alongside some of the largest concentrations of UK poverty.

Unhappiness at continued poverty and widening inequality – coupled with perceptions that these circumstances have resulted from neo-liberalist policies – spurred the growth of resistance to this paradigm, particularly in the late 1990s and early years of the new century. In its more strident forms, often involving street protests, this opposition was variously called 'the anti-capitalist movement' (in the UK), 'the global justice movement' (in North America) and 'the anti-globalisation movement' (worldwide). Many of the most visible mass demonstrations occurred around meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions, the G8, the OECD and the WTO, thereby reflecting the strong connections that these critics have drawn between certain global governance institutions and poverty.

Largely in response to this opposition, the reigning policy discourse in global governance has, over the past decade, shifted from neo-liberalism to what might be termed a 'global social market' approach. Under this revised paradigm the focus of global public policy remains to promote economic welfare through market forces. Hence talk in some quarters of a 'Post-Washington Consensus' exaggerates the degree of policy reorientation (Stiglitz, 1998). However, the altered perspective does hold that *laissez faire* can cause harm in some situations, including for vulnerable social groups, and that corrective interventions from official, business and civil society circles are warranted in these circumstances. In this sense the global social market framework can suitably be termed an '*Augmented Washington Consensus*' (Rodrik, 2001).

Various global governance measures of the past decade – including a number that directly address poverty – reflect a global social market outlook. For example, the UN MDGs have committed governments to major reductions in poverty by 2015. Cancellation of many debts of low-income countries to global institutions has been justified largely as a move for poverty reduction. The IMF and World Bank have recast what were previously known as 'structural adjustment programmes' in a new vocabulary of 'poverty reduction strategies'. In recognition that markets cannot deliver all welfare by themselves, talk of 'global public goods' has spread across global economic governance (Kaul, 2003). On social market lines the ILO has promoted an agenda of 'decent work' in a globalising economy (WCSDG, 2004). With a proliferation of CSR schemes, global business is meant to work more deliberately against poverty as well (Jenkins, 2005).

However, as noted earlier, this heightened attention in global governance to proactive anti-poverty measures has applied mainly to 'low-income countries' rather than to 'advanced economies' such as the UK. Global regulatory agencies have rarely – if ever – highlighted poverty issues in respect of the UK, let alone pressed Westminster or Whitehall to adopt particular social policy initiatives. That said, the general shift towards a social market approach globally has perhaps set a backdrop that has encouraged the pursuit of 'Caring Conservatism' and 'New Labour' in the UK since the late 1990s. If global governance had instead continued a strong promotion of neo-liberalist policies into the twenty-first century it would have been more difficult for UK governments to run against the grain with a social market approach in this country.

To be sure, the adequacy of a global social market formula for poverty alleviation is a matter for debate. Critics argue that the turn to greater social sensitivity is not sufficient so long as an underlying promotion of market capitalism remains. Certainly a decade of New Labour has not halved poverty in the UK any more than the MDGs are on course to halve poverty in low-income countries by 2015. To this extent more ambitious reorientations of global governance policies might be required in order to make deeper and more lasting inroads against poverty in the UK and elsewhere.

Global governance and the alleviation of UK poverty

As noted earlier, not all effects of global governance on poverty in the UK are negative. On the contrary, transplanetary regimes have also exerted some countervailing forces against impoverishment in this country. One such 'positive' impact is rather suspect, inasmuch as it flows from the disproportionate power that UK-based actors have long exerted in a number of global regimes. Less problematically, global governance offers other positive potentials for poverty alleviation in the UK in terms of: (a) providing venues for policy learning; (b) advancing rights discourses; and (c) promoting global-scale social democracy.

Disproportionate UK power

Global governance has advantaged efforts to combat UK poverty to the extent that actors from this country have exerted disproportionate influence in these regimes. The UK is only one amongst more than 200 countries in the world, and its population accounts for less than 1 per cent of humanity. Yet from this small minority position, UK governments have for 65 years held one of five permanent seats on the UN Security Council as well as pivotal positions with substantial votes on the Executive Boards of the IMF and the World Bank. UK governments have also had membership in elite clubs of states such as the G8, the OECD and the BIS. Imperial history has given UK governments a leading role in the Commonwealth. In addition, London has hosted the headquarters of various private global governance regimes, particularly in the area of finance.

From such privileged positions UK-based actors have been able to craft global rules that tend unduly to advantage this country in the world distribution of resources. For example, by holding a central position in the global monetary order the pound sterling has given UK residents better exchange rates and higher purchasing power than populations of countries with more marginal currencies. Likewise, WTO rules *inter alia* on agriculture, services and intellectual property have generally worked to the disproportionate benefit of UK-based producers. The global non-proliferation regime has sustained the UK position as one of a handful of states with nuclear weapons. Private global governance has reinforced the central UK role in global finance, helping to bring untold flows of capital to the City of London. In these ways and more, global governance has been an important factor in preserving a high ranking for the UK in international comparisons of per capita income.

Of course these advantages to the UK in the international distribution of resources could have been exploited to better effect in combating poverty within the country. The persistence of impoverishment inside the UK has largely resulted from national policy positions. Thus some other countries with levels of per capita GDP similar to the UK have lower poverty thanks in good part to economic and social policies that promote a more even distribution of resources across their population. With a Gini coefficient of around 34 the UK has one of the higher income inequalities in the EU and is on this measure more comparable with Egypt or Laos than with Germany or Sweden (CIA, 2010).

Pressures on the UK poor could well grow as the country's privileged positions in global governance are eroded in the coming years and decades. Opposition grows to global regulatory arrangements that are widely regarded as undemocratic and unjust legacies of a colonialist Euro-centric world order. Already memberships of the G8, the OECD and the BIS are expanding and leaving the UK in a relatively less prominent role. The old EU-US axis at the heart of WTO trade negotiations has in recent years expanded to a Quad that also includes Brazil and India, with China playing an increasingly active part as well. Since 2006, votes in the Bretton Woods institutions have been reallocated towards so-called 'emerging economies', and it is only a matter of time before the UK seat on the IMF and World Bank Executive Boards is absorbed into a collective EU representation. Nor is the pre-eminence of London in global financial markets guaranteed forever. It is therefore quite likely that advantages from the political economy of global governance which have flowed to the UK over the past 60+ years will be considerably reduced in the coming generation or two.

The loss of these privileges could rebound negatively on the UK poor, particularly if the gains previously achieved through political advantage in global governance are not matched through productivity increases. Alternatively, or at the same time, increased pressures on the UK poor from power shifts in global regulation could be countered with government policies of more progressive redistribution of resources across the national population. However, a move towards deeper social democracy would require a major recalibration of UK politics, and the broader electorate might well resist such reallocations of national resources to the poor at a time when the country is in relative decline within the global economy.

Policy learning

Whereas advantages to poverty alleviation in the UK that accrue from the country's history of arbitrary privilege in global governance could be seen as morally rather dubious, no such doubts need surround a second type of potential benefit, namely, that of collective learning. Global governance institutions provide many opportunities for sharing lessons and good practices across countries and their governments. If done well, the resultant transfer of policy ideas and instruments can promote more effective strategies to counter poverty.

Many of the global governance processes reviewed earlier in this paper provide venues for learning and transfer in respect of social policies in the UK. Ministers, parliamentarians, officials, consultants and civil society actors from the UK constantly participate in relevant UN commissions and conferences, OECD committees, G8 summits, ASEM gatherings and UCLG meetings. The academic literature refers in this regard to the operation of global 'epistemic communities' in various fields of policy who build up their expertise through ongoing exchanges of knowledge.

To be sure, it is not helpful to diffuse failed practices in respect of poverty alleviation; nor should principles and mechanisms that succeeded in one context be applied to another situation where they are inappropriate (Hulme, 2005). Policies on education, employment, health, participation and welfare that work positively in, say, Sweden or the USA might not play out successfully against poverty in the UK. Likewise, certain

harms of neo-liberalism for poverty in the UK and elsewhere have resulted because broad ideological premises were spread from one country to the next without due attention to contextual specificities. However, if pursued with care and sensitivity, policy learning and transfer through global governance processes can have beneficial effects for poverty reduction.

Rights discourses

A second straightforwardly positive effect of global governance on UK poverty comes through the discourse of economic and social rights that UN agencies in particular have promoted since the 1970s. Whereas the historical paradigm of human rights in the UK has emphasised civil and political freedoms, global governance norms emanating from the UN system have equally stressed economic, social and cultural requisites of a decent life. The global human rights apparatus thereby offers a major (albeit thus far generally under-utilised) discursive and legal resource for anti-poverty campaigners in the UK.

Economic and social rights are headlined through a host of UN institutions and instruments (Bayefsky, 2010). The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has been in force since 1976. Other UN treaties with provisions regarding adequate or decent standards of living include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1981), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (2003), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008). Implementation of each convention is monitored and evaluated by a specially designated committee of experts. These committees, most of which meet in Geneva, are serviced by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. In addition, the ILO oversees 188 global conventions regarding labour standards, many of which have a bearing on poverty.

The development and implementation of these various global governance instruments for economic and social rights have helped to shift policy frames worldwide in favour of poverty alleviation. In this vein, discourses of security have moved away from a heavily military-strategic mode (as prevailed in the mid-twentieth century) towards a 'human security' paradigm that places poverty eradication at its core. The much-cited 'human development indicators' calculated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in respect of all countries, including the UK, likewise reinforces a global priority on poverty reduction that encourages anti-poverty work in the UK.

In addition to this general policy framing effect, the global human rights machinery also offers specific channels to lobby for national policy change in respect of poverty alleviation. The academic literature refers in this regard to a 'boomerang effect', whereby citizens work through global venues to alter state policies (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). For example, civil society associations have the possibility to submit reports to UN human rights committees that supplement and possibly contest the accounts that the UK government prepares (Donald and Mottershaw, 2009: 25-7).

On these lines some 30 UK citizen groups supplied shadow reports to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2009 (CESCR, 2009). For example, a submission from the Scottish Human Rights Commission drew attention *inter alia* to issues of adequate housing and health inequalities (SHRC, 2009). In another example, certain women's associations such as the Fawcett Society feed into shadow reports to monitor UK Government compliance with CEDAW (Fawcett, 2010: 5, 33). In addition, individual women can petition the CEDAW Committee under the Optional Protocol, although few are aware of this possibility (Bird, 2010). Similarly, trade unions and other civil society groups can take relevant complaints about working conditions and poverty in the UK to the various supervisory bodies that oversee the ILO conventions. Arguably UK activists could make still more use of these 'boomerang' tactics in their anti-poverty campaigns.

Global social democracy

Another move along boomerang lines that could advance anti-poverty efforts in the UK is the promotion of global social democracy. As seen earlier, global neo-liberalism facilitated *laissez faire* policies in the UK during the 1980s, and global social market discourses have promoted the rise of corrective policy interventions on poverty in the UK since 1997. Similarly, a turn towards a global social democracy paradigm could encourage a shift towards progressive redistribution and active political participation as an anti-poverty strategy in the UK.

Certain (albeit on the whole still limited) measures in the vein of global social democracy are already being pursued. For example, the Bretton Woods institutions and the G8 have cancelled a number of unsustainable external debts of various low-income countries. In addition, fair trade schemes that have proliferated since the 1990s seek to redistribute gains from global commerce in favour of poor producers in poor countries. Of more relevance to poverty in the UK, transgovernmental networks in G8 and OECD contexts have in recent years intensified efforts to reduce tax evasion through offshore finance centres, steps that can reduce income inequalities in 'rich countries' as well as increase government revenues for social programmes. The global financial crisis of 2007–8 has given new life to proposals for a currency transaction tax (on foreign exchange dealings) that could generate very substantial funds *inter alia* for social policies. Other proposals in the vein of global social democracy that could benefit the UK poor include a global competition policy (pursued in incipient form since 2001 through the transgovernmental International Competition Network) that would better curb the power of transnational companies vis-à-vis vulnerable consumers. In addition, the establishment of a Global Mobility Organisation could bring greater formalisation, stability and equity to the position of poor migrants in the UK and elsewhere (cf. Ghosh, 2000).

Yet, although the prospective benefits of global social democracy for poverty alleviation are quite evident, to date little civil society action on UK poverty has engaged with this agenda of more ambitious global governance reform. A number of UK-based development NGOs have promoted ideas and proposals of global social democracy in their campaigns against poverty in the global south. However, groups that work for poverty reduction through greater social democracy within the UK itself have generally not given their activism a global dimension. For example, such

advocates could collaborate more intensively with the Tax Justice Network (whose international secretariat is located in the UK) to address tax evasion through global finance by wealthy circles in the UK. Similarly, activists on UK poverty could more concertedly back initiatives for more public-interest global regulation of transnational corporations. Advocates could also engage debates on currency taxes in order to draw attention to their potential benefits for anti-poverty work in 'rich countries' such as the UK. By absenting themselves from these activities, campaigners on UK poverty weaken the momentum for global social democracy and also reduce the chances that, to the extent that this paradigm does gain ground, it is made to work for poverty alleviation in this country.

Conclusion

This paper has identified a host of ways that global governance is relevant to UK poverty, both positively and negatively. By focusing on global regulatory processes the paper has not denied the importance of national and local governments in addressing UK poverty. Indeed, as many examples have indicated, much global governance directly involves national and local authorities. However, global governance is also substantially more than the individual nation state, and UK activists need to attend to global rules and regulatory institutions as part of any successful strategy of poverty alleviation in this country.

Where, then, are the key points for civil society actors to engage global governance on poverty issues? A preliminary point to emphasise regarding this practical advice is the need for more detailed research than the present broad overview has been able to undertake. In particular, the nature, extent and impact of transgovernmental networks in relation to UK poverty warrants much more investigation. Likewise, the opportunities and limitations of different channels of civil society access to global governance processes require more precise evaluation. Nevertheless, the analysis in this paper points to the following suggestions for action.

In terms of shaping broad economic and social policy discourses (such as neo-liberalist, global social market, and global social democracy paradigms), the main global governance venues relevant for the UK are the G8, the OECD, the ILO and certain transgovernmental venues such as the ISSA. Activists on UK poverty would do well to monitor activities in these quarters and to intervene at strategic decision points. The IMF also figures in the production of macroeconomic policy frameworks, and UK civil society groups could seek to participate in the Fund's general strategic thinking as well as its country-specific annual Article IV consultations (as has happened in Switzerland, for example). However, UK governments have usually taken little heed of IMF analysis and advice, which generally tend to impact more in the global south. For the rest, UK poverty activists can engage supportively with global governance arenas such as fair trade schemes, the Commonwealth and the UN that strongly push a global social democracy agenda.

In terms of specific anti-poverty policies, the main global governance venues to engage vary depending on the issue. In respect of child poverty in the UK, for instance, activists would best turn to UNICEF and the UN human rights machinery. Regarding gender and poverty, the main sites would be relevant UN agencies and possibly also the UCLG gender equality committee. In relation to employment and labour standards (including for vulnerable migrant workers) the principal global places to go are the ILO, the OECD and various CSR arrangements. CSR frameworks can also be engaged on consumer protection issues for socially vulnerable circles. To advocate digital inclusion the global place to go is ICANN. To promote pro-poor financial regulation attention could be given to the OECD, the BIS, the IMF, the G8 and various private global regulatory mechanisms. Concerning tax justice, the indicated global governance venue is the OECD. As noted earlier, most of these global governance agencies now have channels in place for civil society participation in their proceedings. Where such arrangements are absent or wanting,

alternative tactics including informal contacts and public demonstrations can be pursued.

Yet in any engagement of global governance, UK poverty activists would do well to move in solidarity with similarly minded civil society groups from other countries and continents. Activism on global issues gains greatest force through global movements, including across north-south lines. By keeping distance from 'development' campaigns for 'poor countries', activists on UK poverty not only miss important allies, but may also be viewed by their counterparts in the global south as making special pleading for already advantaged countries of the global north. Opportunities for north-south collaboration on poverty such as GCAP and GCE have already been noted. The World Social Forum movement also provides major openings to meet anti-poverty groups from all corners of the planet. So do the civil society meetings that nowadays convene alongside UN conferences, IMF/World Bank meetings, Commonwealth and G8 summits, and ASEM gatherings. Global governance logically calls forth global civil society, and UK poverty groups could strengthen their cause in a more global world by further globalising their own networks.

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