



Relational Pathways: Mapping Agency and Poverty Dynamics through Green Revolutions

Our focus

One of the central challenges for poverty reduction in low-income countries is to find ways of securing sustainable movements out of poverty through agriculture. The promise of a 'Green Revolution', based on agricultural intensification driven by modern science and

technology, is always central to global policy discourses and research ambitions. Yet worsening inequality and environmental degradation have often accompanied such agricultural intensification in Asia and Africa.

RELATIONAL PATHWAYS



Our approach

Based on extensive fieldwork in a 'successful' Green Revolution region in India, we are developing a 'relational agency pathways approach', which focuses on poor people's agency as the capacity to make a difference to a social, ecological and technological situation. Our conceptual approach posits poverty as a dynamic process constituted by evolving networks between humans and nature, mediated by science and technology.

To develop the approach, we draw on theoretical insights on relational agency from the field of Science, Technology and Society studies, and incorporate the ESRC STEPS Centre's 'pathways approach' to environmental sustainability and social justice.

We use a varied methodology including ethnographic life histories, archival data and multi-criteria mapping, to map relational pathways into and out of poverty as experienced by farmers and agricultural workers in Tamil Nadu, India.

We will test and further develop the approach in Machakos County in Kenya.

Overall, we aim to address two key research questions:

- 1) How is agency of small farmers and agricultural workers constituted through relations with other humans, natural forces and technologies?
- 2) How can we use such a relational approach to agency most effectively to understand diverse pathways into and out of poverty for smallholders and the landless in agriculture?

Other research issues, such as those centred on the ongoing agrarian crisis in India, are being generated through conversations with project participants (particularly farmers and agricultural development practitioners) and with research users – throughout research design, analysis and dissemination.

Our impact

This approach is novel in the field of development research and poverty studies. While contributing to a better understanding of the conditions under which pathways out of poverty are realised, it will also lend itself to engagement with

new poverty-alleviation policies, programmes and practices.

A high-profile Advisory Committee is cooperating with the project team to realise its objectives. The project is allied with two major Centres/

Consortia with wide reach – the STEPS Centre (steps-centre.org) and the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) (future-agricultures.org.)

Brought together at an inception workshop, advisors helped frame the research, ensuring its relevance for contemporary smallholder and farmworker realities in low-income regions of Africa and India. The workshop helped the project align better with questions and issues of interest in policy communities with which advisors are linked.

A final workshop in Kenya will showcase the project's approach and findings to researchers and instrumental stakeholders, to facilitate impact on policy and practice. Our team will also build and extend capacity to adapt and apply the approach, by holding a training workshop for junior researchers and practitioners.

The project is of interest to:

- Government institutions attempting to intensify smallholder agriculture through better use of natural resources and new technologies
- Rural development organisations (including non-governmental ones), active in organising initiatives for poverty alleviation
- Academic researchers working on agricultural sustainability and poverty issues in the global south
- Environmental NGOs at international and grassroots levels
- Farmers' associations such as the East African Farmers Federation.

Our outputs

- The relational agency pathways approach will be made available through a series of open access working papers, journal articles and policy briefs, as well as blogs and other web content.
- A documentary film will be produced in India to showcase the approach developed.
- A training manual (also to be made available online) will be launched at the final workshop and will supplement the project training workshop.

Our research team

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