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Deliberating towards development: A framework for co-constructing policies with people in poverty

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ABSTRACT

This paper builds on the results of an international participatory research project that identified nine dimensions of poverty, including six that are "hidden" and typically overlooked in research and policy. Drawing on these dimensions and original case studies conducted in France, Mauritius and a West African country, we propose an approach to policy co-construction and evaluation that includes people experiencing poverty as partners. We offer a methodological framework that is sensitive to hidden dimensions of poverty and provide guidance to navigating the challenges of deliberation in contexts where strong power asymmetries are likely to translate into epistemic injustice. The framework requires four shifts in thinking about participation in development policies: (1) it broadens the definition of poverty to include dimensions beyond deprivation; (2) it acknowledges people in poverty as knowers and agents of change; (3) it relies on a stronger form of participation that goes beyond consultation, where people deliberate as equals and learn from one another; and (4) it transfers part of the policy ownership and decision-making power to people in poverty themselves.

1. Introduction

The concern about poverty in development has focused historically on lack of income, and target 1.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals still defines the objective of eradicating poverty by 2023 in monetary terms. Unsurprisingly therefore, reflecting this legacy, most measures of poverty, as found in national poverty lines, continue to focus on lack of income (Bedük, 2020). Poverty, however, is not only about purchasing power. It is also about a range of deprivations in areas such as nutrition, health, education or housing, that can be addressed by the provision of public goods, and that can be assessed separately from income levels. This is why, since the 1990s, various definitions have been proposed of multidimensional poverty: it is such an approach that target 1.2 of the SDGs encourages States to adopt, by mentioning the pledge to "reduce at least by half the proportion of [people] living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions" (emphasis added). Yet, we have understood more recently that this expansion of the definition of poverty beyond its strictly monetary dimensions remains itself insufficient. It pays scant attention to the dimensions of power (Fischer, 2018) and to the dynamics of social exclusion (De Schutter, 2024). Nor does it acknowledge the non-material dimensions of poverty, that people in poverty consider forming an essential component of their lived experience: they are the 'hidden dimensions of poverty'.

Teams of co-researchers – practitioners, academic experts and people living in poverty – sought to identify these 'hidden dimensions of poverty' through a collaborative effort relying on the "merging of knowledge" methodology (All Together in Dignity – Fourth World, 2012). The process, which took place between 2016 and 2019, covered six countries (Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the UK and the USA). It found nine dimensions that, despite differences in the daily lives of people in poverty in the six countries, appeared to be common across the contexts studied. Existing alongside the more familiar *privations* relating to lack of decent work, insufficient and insecure income and material and social deprivation, three dimensions are *relational:* social maltreatment, institutional maltreatment and unrecognised contributions. Three other dimensions constitute the *core experience of poverty*. These dimensions – suffering in body, mind and heart; disempowerment, and struggle and resistance – place the anguish and agency of people at the centre of the conceptualisation of poverty. These nine dimensions, and hence the experience of poverty, are further understood

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to be modified by five factors: identity; timing and duration; location; environment and environmental policy; and cultural beliefs. The findings were published in this journal five years ago (Bray et al., 2020). A brief description of the nine dimensions is presented in Table 1 below, and Fig. 1 shows how they relate to one other.

The research led the French national statistics office (INSEE) to integrate notions such as institutional maltreatment and social isolation in census data and to assess the other "hidden" dimensions through participatory processes (INSEE, 2023; Richard, 2024). The hidden dimensions of poverty matter to the fight against poverty, because they are a key factor explaining the non-take-up of rights (De Schutter, 2022a) or the obstacles people in poverty face in having access to employment, housing or education, where institutional and social maltreatment play a major role (De Schutter, 2022b). These dimensions of poverty are still often dismissed or undervalued, however, both because they are difficult to quantify and because they relate more to the subjective experience of poverty than to the objective conditions of deprivation.

In this paper, we explore whether and how these hidden dimensions of poverty can be incorporated in the design and evaluation of development programmes and social policies that aim to combat poverty. We argue that interventions should systematically examine more complex and nuanced dimensions of poverty by integrating the experiential knowledge of those living in situations of poverty. We offer a new conceptual framework to guide policymakers and practitioners. We build on existing literature and three original case studies in order to translate the dimensions outlined by Rachel Bray and colleagues into design and evaluation questions, and we propose a methodology and key principles for the design and evaluation of policies co-constructed with people in poverty, to ensure the 'hidden' dimensions of poverty will not be neglected.

Table 1
Dimensions of poverty identified in Bray et al. (2020).

Group of dimensions	Dimension	Brief description
Core experience of poverty	Disempowerment	The lack of control and dependency on others resulting from severely constrained choices
	Suffering in the mind, body and heart	Living in poverty means experiencing intense physical, mental and emotional suffering accompanied by a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it
	Struggle and resistance	There is an ongoing struggle to survive, which includes resisting and counteracting the effects of the many forms of suffering brought by privations, abuse, and lack of recognition
Relational dynamics	Institutional maltreatment	The failure of national and international institutions, through their actions or inaction, to respond appropriately and respectfully to the needs and circumstances of people in poverty, and thereby to ignore, humiliate and harm them.
	Social maltreatment	People in poverty are negatively perceived and treated badly by other individuals and informal groups.
	Unrecognised contributions	The knowledge and skills of people living in poverty are rarely seen, acknowledged or valued. Often, individually and collectively, people experiencing poverty are wrongly presumed to be incompetent.
Privations	Lack of decent work	The prevalent experience of being denied access to work that is fairly paid, safe, secure, regulated and dignified.
	Insufficient and insecure income	Having too little income to be able to meet basic needs and social obligations, to keep harmony within the family and to enjoy good living conditions.
	Material and social deprivation	Lack of access to the goods and services necessary to live a decent life, participating fully in society.

The article is organised as follows: Part II outlines our theoretical background, critically examining the concepts of participation and deliberation, and how they have been applied in the development field. Part III describes the research process that informed the development of the framework. Part IV presents the framework, including the methodological and substantive components. Part V discusses the framework in more detail, describing how it differs from existing guidelines and tools, specifying the scope for its use and pointing out its limitations. Part VI concludes.

2. Theoretical background: from participation to deliberation

2.1. Participatory approaches to poverty eradication: the rationale

Three decades ago, when he made the case for citizen participation in environmental decision-making, Daniel Fiorino (1990) distinguished between three types of arguments. First, citizen participation might be motivated by a normative ideal: ordinary citizens should be given the necessary space to formulate and express their preferences, according to this "ethical norm", because "a technocratic orientation is incompatible with democratic ideals" (p.227). This argument, implicitly tied to the all-affected principle that claims that "all who are affected by a decision should be able to have a voice in that decision" (Saunders-Hastings & Reich, 2025) is reflected in numerous international legal documents that recognise the "right to take part in the conduct of public affairs" (e.g. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 5 of the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination), or that reaffirm the right to participate for specific vulnerable groups (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples). The Guiding Principles on extreme poverty and human rights, adopted in 2012 by the Human Rights Council, an intergovernmental body of 47 governments elected by the United Nations General Assembly, includes this recommendation (Article 38):

> "States must ensure the active, free, informed and meaningful participation of persons living in poverty at all stages of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of decisions and policies affecting them. This requires capacity building and human rights education for persons living in poverty, and the establishment of specific mechanisms and institutional arrangements, at various levels of decision-making, to overcome the obstacles that such persons face in terms of effective participation."

Although Fiorino insisted that "the case for participation should begin with a normative argument" (p. 239), he put forward two additional claims. First, drawing on the experiential knowledge of so-called "lay" citizens is essential: under the right conditions, participation of ordinary citizens (here, people in poverty) in the design and evaluation of policies seeking to change their situation is likely to lead to better outcomes than those attainable by experts and policymakers alone. In research also, participatory and transdisciplinary approaches emphasise the potential epistemic gains from incorporating local, indigenous and experiential knowledge as complementary to other forms of knowledge held by experts, academics and practitioners (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the UN Secretary General, 2019). Going further, and building on the work of Marx, Hegel and Lukács, feminist philosophers have argued that the standpoint – or situated knowledge – of oppressed groups, such as workers, women and slaves, provides "a

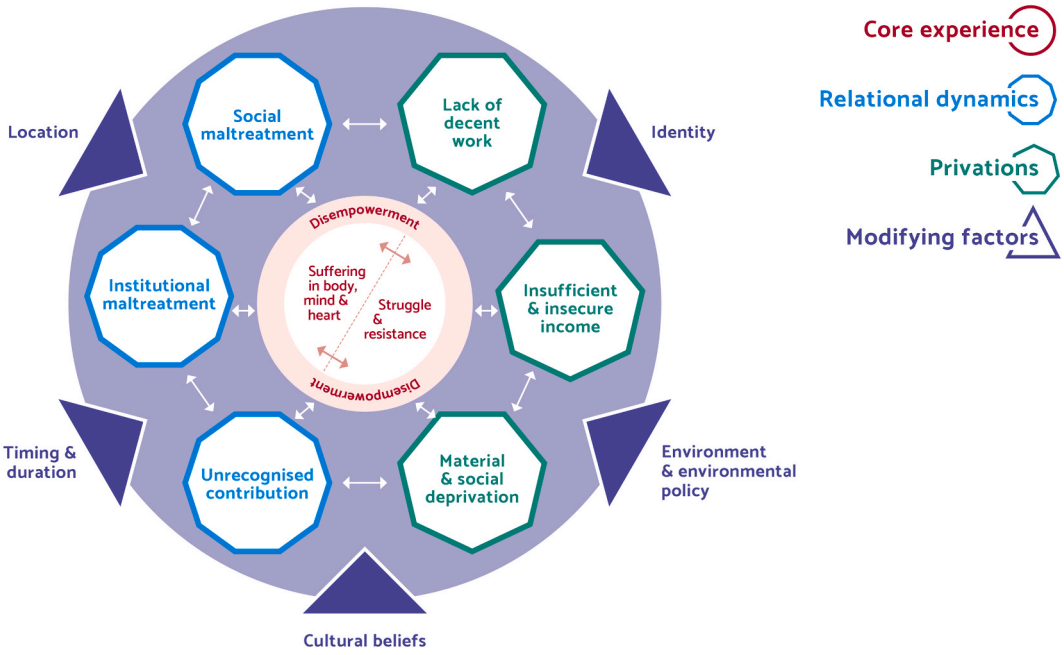


Fig. 1. The "hidden dimensions of poverty" diagram.

superior starting point for eventually changing the world" than that of the dominant groups, like controllers and owners of capital, men or masters (Bowell, 2011). Secondly, Fiorino notes that citizen participation in decisions affecting them makes them more legitimate in their eyes, and thus also more likely to be respected, leading to better results. Empirical research supports Fiorino's claim: people tend to be more satisfied with decisions they have participated in taking (Casey, 2018; Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

Development approaches hailing the participation of "lay" citizens have been piloted and promoted in various contexts over the last half century, in order to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of policies whilst involving and empowering local populations (Cleaver, 2001): it is almost as if a new "orthodoxy" has emerged (Cornwall, 2003). Rooted in community development in the 1950s and partially inspired by early participatory action research and Paulo Freire's seminal work emphasising dialogue and co-learning as crucial to the emancipation of oppressed groups (Freire, 1970), Robert Chambers and others have popularized participatory approaches through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA). Various frameworks, tools and guidelines have been proposed to promote participatory forms of development. Recent examples include the Multidimensional Poverty Assessment Tool (MPAT) and Participatory Impact Assessment and Learning Approach (PIALA), both developed and tested by IFAD (the International Fund for Agricultural Development), and the guide for Participatory Impact Assessments, published by a team from Tufts University (Catley et al., 2013).

2.2. The (open) question of power in participation

While the right to participate is firmly rooted in international human rights law and constitutes a key principle in human rights-based approaches to development, the term "participation" remains ambiguous (Arnstein, 1969; Goulet, 1989; Day, 1997; Mosse, 2001). In typologies of different forms of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Godrie, 2017; González, 2019), power has been the core element distinguishing between different levels or depths, often represented as rungs on a ladder or points on a spectrum. As processes move from more superficial and symbolic levels of involvement to higher or deeper forms of participation, more power is transferred from the convenors (whether researchers, policymakers, politicians or others) to other participants. Merely informing or consulting citizens can lead to placation and tokenization respectively. In contrast, a more substantial transfer of control from convenors to communities allows for empowerment and community-based ownership over projects and policies (González, 2019).

Given the ambiguity of the concept and the varying degrees to which participatory approaches question and transform power relations or instead maintain the *status quo*, the added value or the actual epistemic gain harvested from participatory processes is difficult to trace. The track record of deploying participatory tools in development has been mixed at best (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Mansuri & Rao, 2013): some authors go so far as to suggesting an "anatomy of failure" in this regard (Ananthpur et al., 2014).

Some critics of participatory approaches to development point to the technical limitations of implementing participation and focus on methodological techniques and tools to improve it. Others raise more fundamental objections to the concept of participation itself (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Scholars of participatory action research note that power, knowledge and participation intersect in multiple ways, and that participation therefore may or may not be truly empowering (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

David Mosse (2001), for instance, notes that though participation has been hailed as the new gold standard by donors and development agencies, this "does not, in itself, democratise power in programme decision-making" (p. 22). He notes that while many policymakers, funders and other powerful actors implementing development programmes express a commitment to participation, experiential knowledge and empowerment of beneficiaries, most are reluctant to cede control, notably over questions of funding and evaluation (see also Saunders-Hastings & Reich, 2025). He warns, moreover, that so-called local knowledge in participatory development projects is more likely to reflect local power relations and their interplay with external interests than to result from a patient and reflexive process of co-construction involving marginalised actors (Mosse, 1994; 2001).

One mechanism through which this may occur is what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls 'epistemic injustice', whereby individuals belonging to certain groups are denied in their capacity as knowers. Fricker distinguishes between two forms of epistemic injustice: a devaluation of the

credibility of the person's words because they belong to a devalued social group (*testimonial injustice*); and a lack of interpretative resources available to the people involved to analyse the situation (*hermeneutical injustice*). In both cases, those individuals – and their knowledge – are *de facto* pushed aside in favour of more powerful actors. Since Fricker's development of the concept, additional forms of epistemic injustice have been highlighted (see e.g. Jomini et al., 2023; Garrau et al., 2023). *Injustices of contribution* are produced where the views expressed by people living in poverty are disregarded because they are thought to be unintelligent and lacking in knowledge, or because they have few places to build their own knowledge. Finally, *injustices of interpretation* occur when survival or resistance strategies that are adopted by people facing hardship are misinterpreted by more privileged groups.[1]

2.3. Beyond participation: the case for a deliberative approach to development

Given the conceptual fluidity and mixed track record of participatory approaches, scholars and practitioners have suggested that a stronger, more demanding concept should guide the democratisation of development policies. In democratic theory, the aim of participatory processes should be to ensure that concertation between stakeholders is based on their arguments rather than their positions of power: in other words, those who participate should do so as equals (Landemore, 2020). One such form of participation as equals is known as deliberation, which refers to "a 'process of exchanging reasons for the purpose of resolving problematic situations' that require interpersonal coordination and cooperation" (Bohman, 1996, p. 27 cited in Escobar, 2011, p. 34). Stemming etymologically from the word 'to balance', deliberation requires that differently positioned actors listen to one another and arrive at a consensus (Mansuri & Rao, 2013, pp. 87-88). It may be understood as "substantive, balanced, and open-minded discussion in which participants voice, listen to, and weigh the merits of competing arguments, sharing diverse perspectives and experiences" (Wang, Fishkin & Luskin, 2020, p. 2166).

Deliberation has been characterised by some as being more suitable for empowering marginalised communities (Buccus & Hicks, 2011), procedurally fairer than other participatory practices (Jacobs & Kaufmann, 2021), and possibly also closer to what disadvantaged communities themselves prefer (Hofer et al., 2024). It has also been practiced in large-scale "real-world experiments" (Fung & Wright 2003, p.5) in various parts of the world, providing important lessons and insights on how ordinary people can co-produce, implement and manage policies and programmes that affect them directly. These experiments, which include the well-known participatory budgeting process in Porto Alegre (Brazil) and neighbourhood governance councils in Chicago (USA), share three key characteristics that are useful to thinking about development policy: first, the projects focus on problems that are specific and tangible, that is, they have a practical orientation; second, the processes involve people that are directly affected by those specific and tangible problems, including ordinary citizens but also others (e.g. local officials); third, the interactions are of a deliberative nature, in the sense that participants listen to one another before making a collective decision, which may be imperfect but must be acceptable to all parties (ibid, p.15).

The question of power is central to such experiments. As Fung and Wright (2003) discuss in relation to their model of Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG), such processes are only likely to function when power imbalances become roughly equalised: if they are not, participants may be better off resorting to other strategies, including exiting the process altogether. Balancing power relations has also been found to be an important design feature for producing the kind of social learning that allows heterogenous groups to re-examine their underlying assumptions and values, providing space for openness to dialogue and common understanding (Herrero et al., 2019).

In the field of development, however, projects that resemble Fung and Wright's EPG model are the exception, not the rule. In the sections below, we offer insights and guidance into how deliberative participation might be organised and how the 'hidden dimensions' of poverty might be captured through such processes.

3. Designing the deliberative framework: a case study approach

In order to develop a new framework for integrating deliberation in the design and evaluation of policies and programs, this research project followed a case study approach. In addition to the core research team (composed of the three co-authors), the project benefited from the expertise of a steering committee, comprising academics and development experts, who met regularly to provide the research team with methodological and substantive guidance.

3.1. Case studies selection

The case studies were selected through purposive sampling and built on existing partnerships and collaborations. The intention was to conduct case studies in countries with varying levels of development in the Global North and South, and to rely on examples of policies or programmes deployed on different territorial levels, including a large-scale programme and smaller-scale or local projects. Through a formalised agreement, the case studies were built upon ongoing projects conducted by the international organisation ATD Fourth World, that co-piloted the research on the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty together with researchers from the University of Oxford (see again Bray et al., 2020). Working with ATD Fourth World for this follow-up project allowed us to partner with people in poverty and professionals working alongside them in three countries, to obtain important background information on the case studies, to organise deliberative processes locally, and to validate and refine outputs with case study participants. It also allowed us to conduct participatory evaluations of policies and programmes with members of an organisation that developed the "merging of knowledge" methodology (see e.g. Wetengere et al. 2024; Bennett, 2024; Skelton et al., 2024; Bucolo et al., 2023) and whose members, including those in poverty, are familiar with the 'hidden dimensions' of poverty research. After several rounds of exploratory research and discussions with local teams, three cases were selected: one in France, one in Mauritius, and one in a West African country.[2]

3.2. Three programmes: minimum income, integrated housing and street children

In France, the selected policy was the country's minimum income scheme (*Revenu de Solidarité Active*, or RSA), introduced in 2009. The RSA covers individuals belonging to two million households, supporting approximately four million people. The sum varies according to household composition and other income received: in 2023, a single adult eligible for the guaranteed minimum income (i.e. with no other resources from work or otherwise) would receive EUR 607,75 per month under the RSA, or approximately half of the monetary poverty line (set at EUR 1,128 per person per month in 2022, representing 60 % of the median income). The RSA was evaluated in 2011 and then a decade later, mainly in terms of its ability to lift households out of poverty and

[1] The typical example of this form of injustice is when people in poverty who buy televisions or smartphones are accused of squandering what little money they have, when this type of spending can help keep their children off of the streets, and allow them to access important public services that are increasingly only available online.

[2] The name of the country has been anonymised throughout this article to protect case study informants from potential reprisals.

ensure their transition to paid employment.

In Mauritius, our research focused on a housing project that was designed, funded and implemented by the government in 2009. It sought to provide households in poverty with access to housing, including 76 families that had been previously living on land that did not belong to them. While a consultation process had preceded the construction of the estate, interlocutors had included NGOs but not the persons in poverty themselves. On paper, and as presented by the minister in charge, the project appeared promising: it was designed based on an "integrated model", seeking to provide housing but also access to work, health services and education. Fifteen years later, however, residents and local media deplore the living conditions, describing the village as desolate and its inhabitants as abandoned.

A third case study analysed campaigns targeting street children in a West African country. From 2010 to 2016, the number of children living in the streets of the urban areas of the country increased by 63 % according to official statistics, up to an estimated figure of 9,000. In response to this development and in reaction to the conditioning of aid on the achievement of quantified objectives in line with the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005), the government set a target of halving the number of street children by 2020. Campaigns to remove children from the streets were carried out by the state and minors were transferred into shelters, entrusted to foster families or returned to their own families. The police, armed with kalashnikovs, were occasionally called in to fill the shelters, which constituted temporary accommodation for the children.

3.3. Case study objectives and methodology

The objective of the case studies was to analyse the impacts of the three programmes through the prism of the 'hidden dimensions' of poverty research, relying on the experiential knowledge of people targeted by the interventions. In other words, we sought to compare and contrast the original policy goals of the interventions as formulated in official documents and discourse with the impacts of the interventions as analysed by people in poverty with direct experience of the programme. Drawing on this comparison, the research team formulated evaluation questions to operationalise the 'hidden dimensions' of poverty. The case study research design was not intended to carry out a comparison of the programmes nor to draw out causal inferences, but rather to explore the relevance of the 'hidden dimensions' of poverty across different contexts.

The case studies were carried out between 2021 and 2023. For all three, a phase of desk research was first conducted. Information on the programme was gathered and analysed, as well as existing evaluations and reports of the policy's impacts; in one case, an interview was conducted with a high-level policymaker to complement the knowledge gained through secondary sources. Importantly, we asked local partners to draft a detailed historical background of each programme, including key dates and events but also their own understanding of the success and challenges of its implementation. Following Stake (1995), this was a crucial phase, helping us to clarify our understanding of the context, and the particularity and complexity of each case.

The second step of the case studies was to confront the stated policy goals and available evaluations of effects with the impacts as identified and analysed by programme beneficiaries and professionals. This step was conducted using two different methodological approaches, depending on local possibilities and constraints: in France and Mauritius, we organised multi-stakeholder workshops, while in the third case study on street children, we consulted local staff with in-depth knowledge of the case. In all cases, participants were informed by the research team about the objectives of the research project, the ethical framework (including confidentiality and anonymity) and potential consequences of their involvement in the project. In France, a two-day evaluation was conducted following a "merging of knowledge" approach, bringing together persons with experience as beneficiaries of the RSA, professionals from public and non-profit institutions involved in delivering the benefit or conducting outreach to potential beneficiaries, and academics (students and social policy experts). In Mauritius, an online workshop was conducted involving housing estate residents and development experts. In the third case study, political unrest and ethical concerns related to working directly with minors led the research team to consult local staff working with street children on a daily basis and with in-depth knowledge of the programme. For all three case studies, a detailed report was drafted by the research team and circulated to case study participants for their feedback. Annex 1 presents the research process, including the case study workshops and selected results in more detail.

3.4. Key results

The case studies led us to collectively identify 'hidden' dimensions of poverty that had been overlooked in the policies and programmes examined. In France, the deliberative process allowed a number of issues to emerge that official evaluations had neglected, including the tense relationships between beneficiaries of the RSA and social services; the administrative obstacles that intended beneficiaries face in seeking to access the scheme; and the extent to which RSA beneficiaries resent the monitoring they are subjected to, which is a source of shame and stress. This case study also pointed to the asymmetry between the institutions administering the RSA and its recipients, and it demonstrated the imbalance present in the so-called 'reciprocal commitment contracts' concluded between social services and beneficiaries: while social workers have control over the income and resources of the recipients, the latter do not have the right to object to the decisions made by the institutions. When recipients make mistakes, the sanctions are often severe and immediate; yet when institutions make mistakes, there are few or no consequences.

The case study in Mauritius revealed that, from the perspective of the tenants, the model housing estate as it was planned contained important flaws that, in their view, partly explain the situation observed in the village today. To obtain a 20 m^2 house (regardless of family size) target beneficiaries had been required to sign a social contract written in English, a language that most of them did not speak. Under this contract, they were obliged to pay a monthly rent; meanwhile, the social contract prohibited them from engaging in commercial activities in the village, depriving some families of their main source of income. According to the contract, tenants were also forbidden from hosting family members, neighbours or other visitors overnight, and they were banned from enlarging or modifying the dwelling according to their familial situation. Since the new housing units were built more than 2 km away from the nearest village, the relocation had led to a "ghettoization" of the households concerned, and, in the absence of a reliable public transport system, to a high level of underemployment and indebtedness.

In the third case study, the dialogue revealed that although the government contended it had reached its goal of halving the number of street children by 2020 with the support of a bilateral development agency, the violent practices had contributed to creating distrust between street children and social workers, making fieldwork even more difficult than before. Based on their long-standing professional experience, local practitioners had become convinced that reconnecting with extended family is essential if children are to move out of extreme poverty and off the streets. This reconnection is made possible through a complex, long and delicate support process involving many partners and based on trust and respect (Godinot et al., 2007; Heyberger, 2012). The case study showed how poorly designed policies, decided in a top-down manner and with pressure from donors to achieve quantifiable objectives, had in fact worsened the situation of children in poverty.

Drawing on these three distinct case studies conducted in different institutional and socio-political contexts, our research shows that the absence of long-term, direct and deliberative participation by people in poverty in the design, implementation and evaluation of social

interventions has led to costly and counterproductive outcomes, particularly when evaluated against criteria that address the hidden, multidimensional aspects of poverty, such as institutional maltreatment, social maltreatment, disempowerment, stigma and shame. Rather than aiming to demonstrate the added value of deliberation in a positive causal sense, the argument proceeds through a form of negative case reasoning (Mahoney & Goertz, 2004), highlighting what happens when the people who are the intended beneficiaries of an intervention are missing from the policymaking process. This logic is akin to counterfactual reasoning in qualitative research (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012), whereby the dysfunctions and blind spots observed under conditions of non-participation suggest, by contrast, the latent value and necessity of participatory approaches—especially for surfacing and actively addressing dimensions of poverty that often remain invisible to technocratic or top-down policy frameworks.

In each of the case studies, we asked participants in the deliberative processes to reflect on the kinds of questions that, in their view, should have been posed to them in the design and evaluation of the policies in question. We then matched these questions to the hidden dimensions of poverty, their definitions in the international report and country reports, and re-formulated them to make them applicable across broader contexts. The following section presents the results of this work.

4. A proposed deliberative framework

The research process based on the case studies described in the previous section resulted in three outputs that together form a deliberative framework. The first component is a set of questions derived from the nine dimensions of poverty that may be used to guide policy design and evaluation. The second component is a method for involving stakeholders in the policy process in the context of strong power asymmetries, based on ATD Fourth World's expertise in the "merging of knowledge" approach, enriched through lessons learnt from the case studies and adapted to the policy cycle. The third lists a series of conditions that are likely to improve the outcomes of a deliberative process involving people in poverty. We present each component below.

4.1. Operationalising hidden dimensions of poverty

The substantive component of the framework, presented in the Annex 2 of this paper, translates the nine dimensions of poverty into concrete questions for policy design and evaluation. By drawing on the definitions of each dimension as described in the international report (ATD Fourth World & University of Oxford, 2019), the individual country-level reports and the case study workshops, the questions intend to make the dimensions operational and specific. For example, in order to assess the impact of a policy or program on the dimension of disempowerment, the framework offers the following key questions:

- To what extent, and how, does the policy empower people in poverty and enable them to fulfil their social responsibilities and duties?
- To what extent does the policy help to reduce the dependency of people in poverty on other actors? How? Is the policy reliant on the generosity and goodwill of donors and contributors (charity-based)? To what extent is it based on rights that are guaranteed and enshrined in legislation?
- To what extent does the policy expand the choices available to persons in poverty? What new options are available to people in poverty as a result of the policy or programme?
- To what extent does the policy or programme provide persons in poverty with more control over their lives?

The questions provided in the framework should be further disaggregated into judgment criteria and indicators that will allow them to be answered. Indicators can be based on newly collected or existing qualitative or quantitative data or, alternatively, on data gathered through the deliberative process (see below). While not all questions will be relevant to all policies or programmes under construction or assessment, it is recommended to start by considering all dimensions, given that they are interrelated and that policies intending to improve one dimension may have unintended consequences on another. Crucially, the indicators used to answer the questions should draw on various forms of knowledge and perspectives (including both qualitative and quantitative data). In most cases, the questions are not intended to result in a binary answer but instead to consider the extent to which a policy or programme leads to a specific effect, as well as the causes or causal mechanisms at play. In other words, the substantive part of the framework is not a checklist but a guide to a reflexive and nuanced deliberative assessment of policy action.

4.2. Integrating shared governance and deliberation in the policy cycle

The methodological component of the framework offers procedural guidance on involving people in poverty in the policymaking process, though it can be used in different situations where power asymmetries between participants are strong. It is characterised by a sequence of six phases, consisting of feedback loops and iterations involving deliberative triangulation. The figure below illustrates these phases. (Fig. 2).

Before launching the design or evaluation process, several preparatory steps must be taken. The first step is to set up the bodies tasked, respectively, with coordinating and supervising the process, and with providing advice.

The coordination should be ensured by a small team involving representatives from the institutions partnering together to implement the framework. Its key roles are to manage the project, to secure resources and logistics for effective execution, to define the expected timeframe for the subsequent phases, to design the methodological process and to ensure that inclusivity and deliberation principles are upheld throughout it. This coordination team is also responsible for setting up the project supervisory (core) panel and advisory board, as well as possible facilitators for the deliberative triangulation (phases 3 and 5).

The supervision should be ensured by a panel comprising researchers, practitioners, policymakers and people experiencing poverty. People in poverty should represent a significant proportion (i.e., at least one third) of the core panel's composition. The role of this panel is to identify key questions to be addressed throughout the (design or evaluation) process; to analyse existing data and gaps to be tackled, to participate in the deliberative triangulation; to identify, set up and

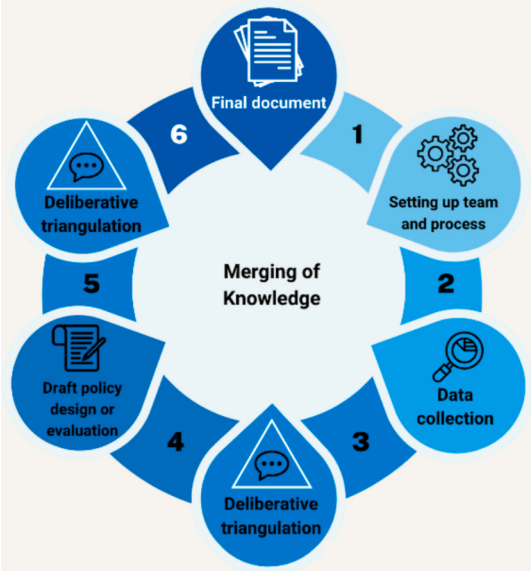


Fig. 2. Phases of the deliberative design/evaluation of a programme or policy.

facilitate peer groups; and to draft the conclusions and the final report with the support of the coordination team. While the coordination team is responsible for the logistics and practical implementation of the process, the core panel holds decision-making power regarding the steps of the process and validates its outputs. Members of the panel should be adequately supported and participate in training to enable them to work constructively with other members. For people in poverty without significant experience in participatory processes, this might include training on public speaking and deliberation; for practitioners and researchers, training might focus on questions of power, participation, active listening, cooperation, or other concepts and skills related to multistakeholder processes.

We also recommend setting up an advisory board composed of key experts from national and international institutions. This board could provide advice on the implementation of the framework, contribute to identifying potential participants to be included in the process, and support the future impact of the results of the process.

Second, once these three bodies have been set up, the core panel begins collecting the evidence necessary to respond to the evaluation questions. The evidence may come from existing data, such as those produced through past consultations (e.g. household surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions), or through analyses such as sustainability impact assessments (SIA) and human rights impact assessments (HRIA). They may also be collected specifically for the purposes of the evaluation/impact assessment, depending on the resources available. In this step, the core panel also identifies the gaps: for which of the dimensions of poverty, or which of the specific evaluation questions are data missing?

In the third step, the coordination team convenes multi-stakeholder workshops, including (at least) one group of persons experiencing poverty (e.g. the potential or actual beneficiaries of the policy or project to be assessed or other persons in poverty that may be affected by it), one group of practitioners who directly implement the policy or project, one group of policymakers, and one group of academics or other experts. The selection of participants for the deliberative triangulation phase should be approached with care (we elaborate more on this in Section V). The workshops have two objectives. First, they should allow to harvest additional information that could not be collected prior to this phase. For evaluation questions that lack responses, the deliberative space created in the workshops serves to ask specific questions to the persons in poverty and to the practitioners about the potential or actual impacts of the given policy or project. It is crucial that workshop questions are formulated by the core panel in a way that is sensitive and understandable to all participants.

The second objective is, through deliberation, to triangulate input coming from the different knowledge types (experiential, professional and scientific) in order to maximise learning. Deliberative triangulation thus serves to deepen the core panel's understanding of the data collected, to compare and contrast different interpretations of the evidence and thus to obtain a more complete picture of the potential or actual impacts of a policy/programme.

The deliberative workshops should include, where possible, alternations between enclave deliberation, also called peer group deliberation, and plenary sessions. Enclave deliberation provides protected spaces for certain underprivileged groups to meet, discuss their ideas and build their arguments through deliberation (see Wojciechowska, 2019; Karpowitz et al., 2009): women participate best, for instance, when they are among themselves (Karpowitz et al., 2012). This also allows to improve interpersonal trust and knowledge of the issues addressed within groups that tend to be excluded from decision-making processes (Karpowitz et al., 2009). In the deliberative triangulation phase provided in this framework, enclave deliberation is a crucial part of step 3: for academics, policymakers and practitioners, it provides a space to confront perspectives in an interdisciplinary manner. And for people in poverty especially, it is an agora that allows them to confer collectively, to move from individual experience to the group's experiential knowledge, to encourage one another and prepare for subsequent plenary sessions.

In this protected space, the participants build a knowledge that is both situated, or position-dependent, and person-invariant, which enables Amartya Sen to state that they build a positional objectivity: "Objectivity, in this sense, is not so much a 'view from nowhere', but a 'view of no one in particular'" (Sen 1993, p. 129). Enclave deliberations and plenary deliberations thus fulfil complementary functions: whereas enclave deliberations allow each group to find its collective voice, plenary deliberations allow the positions of peer groups to meet, interact and share their respective positions. Plenary deliberations start with spokespersons presenting these positions. These spokespersons should faithfully reflect what emerged from the enclave deliberations: it may help to define their mandates as both imperative and revocable (Van Outryve d'Ydewalle, 2024). Once positions have been presented and understood by the other groups, structured exchanges and debates follow, drawing on various tools and methods that acknowledge that participants may have different preferred communication styles and modes of expression (including visual, verbal, non-verbal and written). Peer groups may also reconvene at various points during the plenary sessions to ensure that all participants are able to follow the discussion, to collectively examine contentious or emerging issues, and to provide mutual support. These various techniques aim to tilt the power balance in such a way that allows actors that are typically marginalised and who are not usually heard to effectively and authentically voice their views, avoiding situations of so-called inadvertent ventriloquism (Chambers, 1994), where the person questioned tells the questioner just what the latter would like to hear.

In step 4, the core panel draws conclusions based on steps 2 and 3. It seeks to organise the data collected according to the different dimensions of poverty and to formulate key recommendations for the design or evaluation of the policy or programme under consideration. These conclusions and recommendations should be submitted to the groups involved in step 3, or at least to delegates of these groups, both to ensure that their proposals have not been distorted by the core paneland to gain new insights. The feedback from this deliberative triangulation (step 5) should be incorporated into the final document by the coordination team and the core panel: this is the final step (6).

4.3. *Towards deliberative equality: key conditions*

A number of conditions are necessary to improve the quality of exchanges in the deliberative method proposed above, specifically by seeking to address epistemic injustice, improve equality among participants, build trust and allow each person's views to be expressed. Five such conditions are highlighted.

First, as in any research process, an ethical framework must be set up to ensure that participants are clearly informed of the objectives, scope and extent of their participation, the possible outcomes, as well as the consequences of their participation; and that they provide their informed consent. Confidentiality rules should be clearly defined, ensuring the participants in the deliberative exchange will be able to speak openly and freely. They should be protected from reprisals or retaliation, including from the risk of losing their entitlements. The use of separate peer groups and spokespersons, as described above, may help in maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of individual views. This also seeks to ensure that exchanges are authentic by avoiding potential biases to the extent possible. Finally, feedback should be provided to the participants, who should be informed of any changes enacted as a result of the process to which they contributed: without the follow-up and responsiveness of decision-makers to the input of participants, frustration and discouragement is likely to create distrust and to hinder future participation.

Second, to make a difference, deliberation must effectively and meaningfully involve people in poverty, whose voices are typically not heard in policymaking processes. While involving intermediary bodies

may be helpful under specific conditions, and while they can empower, mobilise and accompany persons in poverty to allow them to participate individually and collectively, relying on NGOs or other civil society organisations is not a substitute for direct involvement of people in poverty as potential and/or actual beneficiaries of projects and programmes. It is important to include a critical mass of people in poverty in the process so that their voices and agenda can be not just heard, but also carry weight relative to other stakeholders. In the triangulation, it is often relevant to provide people in poverty the opportunity to speak first, ensuring that they will contribute to framing the discussion: this reverses the usual order of mainstream society, in which people in poverty are silenced or have others speak for them, and it challenges the habitual assumption that academics are the source of knowledge.

Third, to ensure effective and sustainable participation, individuals representing policymakers, funders and other decision-makers should benefit from the support of their institutions and hierarchies. They should be encouraged and incentivised to design projects that require the participation of people in poverty through ex-ante impact assessments, ex-post evaluations and continuous monitoring. The quality of participation and deliberation must be a crucial part of evaluation, and institutions must account for the necessary resources and time to compensate for participants' time, energy, travel, etc. The deliberative process should be treated as an investment rather than a cost. The resources required include the time and effort required to collect and analyse existing or new data necessary for responding to the evaluation questions (e.g. surveys and interviews), time and space for conducting multi-stakeholder workshops, compensation for the time and input of workshop participants, as well as budget for facilitators and support staff. It is important not to rush the process and to ensure the pace is set by those who require the most support to participate, rather that dictated by the schedules of those who hold positions of power.

Fourth, uneven power relations between participants, including between women and men, or between members of different ethnic or religious groups, must be actively addressed. Participants of deliberative processes do not arrive at the table endowed with the same power, including resources, information and deliberative skills and experience. Persons experiencing poverty, in particular, may face barriers related to language or literacy, creating the risk of capture of deliberative processes by a narrow elite. The most marginalised groups should therefore be empowered throughout the process. A variety of working methods and tools may be mobilised, including the use of different means of expression (e.g., illustrations, theatre-forum, etc.) to ensure that those less comfortable with written or oral expression are not put at a disadvantage. Failing to address power differentials risks silencing some participants and thus losing key perspectives and knowledge, ignoring interpretations and producing biased results.

Finally, as a result of differences in power, experience and capacities, facilitation and support to participants of a participatory process is a crucial component. Facilitators should be experienced and perceived as legitimate by all groups: policymakers/evaluators, practitioners, people experiencing poverty, academics and other groups associated in the process. Facilitators fulfil multiple roles: they should propose ground rules for the interactions to take place; they should ensure that the deliberative exercise is not dominated by one or several actors; and they should equalize power differentials, in particular by supporting the group of persons experiencing poverty. Ideally, one facilitator should be specifically assigned to the task of providing such support, both during the deliberative process and ahead of time, in preparing their contributions.

5. Discussion, scope and limitations

The framework proposed above seeks to contribute to thinking about development projects and social policies differently. It builds on both experiential knowledge and its complementarity with others forms of expertise. We argue that it is different from existing tools and guidelines (such as PPAs, PRAs, MPAT, PIALA, etc.) because of the fourfold shift in usual policymaking and practice it requires.

The first shift broadens the lens of policymaking from an income-based or multidimensional perspective on poverty focused on deprivations to one that acknowledges hidden dimensions of poverty. While efforts have been made to include dimensions such as education, health, and standards of living in (mainly quantitative) indicators used to track development and social progress, notably through the Human Development Index and the Multidimensional Poverty Index, the framework we propose invites experts and policymakers to further broaden their understanding of what it means to live in poverty. Shame, disempowerment, institutional and social maltreatment: these dimensions require a more subtle and nuanced perspective on how projects and policies are elaborated and evaluated. They invite us to look at people in poverty as holders of a specific perspective and valuable knowledge, acknowledging both their strengths and fragilities beyond the traditional deficit model. The specificity of the proposed deliberative framework (and, we would argue, the source of its legitimacy), is that the categories or dimensions that guide the design or evaluation of the policies are themselves the fruit of a co-construction process with people in poverty. This differs from other frameworks or processes previously piloted, where researchers or policymakers arrived with a predetermined list (see e.g. Crocker, 2007 for an analysis of Sabine Alkire's approach to participatory development in Pakistan).

This brings us to the second shift. The proposed framework explicitly acknowledges people in poverty as knowers and agents of change, as partners in the policy process rather than passive beneficiaries. This is a profound epistemological change: it requires that the "experts" involved, whether they are academics, practitioners or policymakers, be humble and abandon the pretence of having a privileged perspective on reality. While this will empower people in poverty participating in the process, it does not mean "ceding power" but a shift in its nature, from "power to" to "power with" (Allen, 1998).

The third shift takes us from the weak requirement of participation to deliberation, which is a more demanding way of involving people in poverty in policymaking. As argued in Section 2, deliberation is more conceptually robust and integrates both participation and the requirements of equality and empowerment. It is an enriched form of participation that requires the co-construction of policies with people in poverty, beyond weaker forms citizen engagement like nominal, passive, consultative, and petitionary participation (Crocker, 2007). The deliberative participation that intervenes at several key points of the policy cycle developed in our framework highlights the importance of recognising and countering power asymmetries to provide background conditions conducive to co-production and social learning.

Fourth, the framework we propose implies shared governance and joint responsibility over programme design and evaluation. This implies that control and decision-making power is devolved from policymakers to a broader and more heterogeneous group, including people in poverty whom the programme or policy targets. The core panel, as described above and like the actors in Fung and Wright's model of Empowered Participatory Governance, is not merely advisory in nature; it pilots the substantive parts of the design and/or evaluation process with the support of the coordination team and advisory board.

These four shifts place our framework in the category of what researchers have coined "post-poverty" or "radical" epistemologies: a set of practices and reflections that make it possible both to produce new knowledge and to combat poverty by putting an end to the epistemic injustices that reinforce other injustices (Godrie et al., 2022; Bucolo, 2023). These epistemologies call into question the universal, objective and neutral nature of scientific knowledge by showing the importance of researchers' values in its production (Santos, 2014). The aims of post-poverty or radical epistemologies are both political and scientific: the objective is as much to transform society towards greater social justice as it is to transform science by recognising the knowledge that comes from the experience of poverty.

The methodological component of this framework builds on decades of experimentation across various contexts in the Global North and South. The approach on which it is based – the "merging of knowledge" – continues to evolve and adapt, and a growing body of literature seeks to theorise, challenge and further develop it (for a list of selected recent works, see Bucolo et al., 2023). However, some questions remain unresolved and are often dealt with on a case-by-case basis by the teams piloting and implementing the processes, as our team has done in the case study research described in Part III. In this section, we clarify the intended scope and reach for the framework we propose, we reflect on some challenges and limitations, and how these could potentially be overcome.

The proposed framework is not intended to replace existing policy assessment tools – whether sustainability impact assessments or social impact assessments relying on econometric tools, or human rights impact assessments relying on the normative framework of human rights. Instead, the aim is to complement them by providing a reliable, qualitative, and deliberative approach to capturing the lived experience of persons in poverty. The scope for its use in the policy cycle is theoretically broad: the framework can be used to guide deliberative exchange and learning in the design, monitoring and evaluation of various types of policies and programmes that are likely to affect people in poverty at local, regional and national levels. Examples of policies and programmes that are likely to benefit from inclusive deliberative exchange include:

- At the local level: A village council in an East African country decides to upgrade the village's old fish market by replacing it with a modern market infrastructure.
- At the regional level: A development bank rolls out a food assistance programme after a natural disaster hits a Caribbean island.
- At the national level: An EU country modifies the eligibility criteria and application procedure for a housing programme.

At the same time, we do not claim that participation (including its deliberative version) provides a quick fix for development or social policies. The time required and the other conditions needed to successfully conduct a deliberative process with persons in poverty may seem unrealistic in some contexts, where a perceived urgency may lead decision-makers to forego a democratic, deliberative process in favour of rapid action. However, decisions that are rushed for the sake of responding immediately to an urgent situation, though intended as temporary, may end up being entrenched and difficult to change, leading to path-dependence (Puffert, 2023). Measures adopted for the sake of efficiency, with little or no deliberation with potential or actual users and beneficiaries, should include an explicit requirement to monitor and evaluate the policy or programme within a specified timeframe using a framework such as the one proposed in this article.

A major question that is likely to emerge when setting up an inclusive and deliberative process to evaluate or elaborate a policy or programme is: "Whom should we involve?" Indeed, the precise perimeter of those affected by a particular policy or programme may be difficult to determine from the start, and various externalities may be understood only once the choice of measure is made. Ideally, the process of choosing the participants should be iterative, and the facilitators should allow for the circle of those involved to be revised in the light of the deliberation itself. In addition, as diverse perspectives as possible should be integrated by seeking to involve participants from different backgrounds (including gender, age, ethnic and social origin): the aim is to arrive at a form of "trans-positional objectivity", which is neither a compromise between different perspectives, nor a mere addition of perspectives, but a renewed understanding of a situation, based on the willingness of all participants to learn from the perspective of others (Sen, 1993; Herrero et al., 2019). Selecting participants based on their analytical capacities or communication skills, while tempting, may skew the process by excluding persons who have been left out of formal education or who struggle the most in a given community.

Deliberative approaches bring together persons that may hold conflicting values and worldviews. They may have opposing perspectives, radically different life experiences and positions within society. They are likely to express themselves using terms that others may not be familiar with. The objective of the framework offered here is not to bridge these differences at all costs (although it is often a side effect that emerges). Instead, the aim is to allow for the safe confrontation of perspectives and knowledge in a way that respects the dignity and experience of each participant, that values his or her place at the table and that seeks to arrive, collectively, at a solution that reflects the group's collective intelligence. Experienced facilitators, perceived as legitimate in the eyes of all participants, should seek to channel the group's input towards constructive exchange rather than settling scores or engaging in personal conflicts.

Likewise, the coordination team and core panel should be aware of cultural norms and practices as well as pre-existing dynamics that might make some potential participants seem more legitimate than others. In many contexts, gender norms may prevent women and girls from speaking freely. In other cases, a village chief or other community leader may appear to be an obvious or unavoidable choice in the group of participants; but other voices, that the chief would be tempted to ignore, should also be included. The team and facilitators should be aware of these norms and dynamics, as well as the potential consequences of challenging them, and adapt the methodology accordingly to avoid elite capture and encourage the participation and expression of underprivileged individuals and groups in a manner that is safe and sustainable for them.

In sum, the coordination team and core panel must be very familiar with and sensitive to the context into which the process is embedded. The participants themselves should be committed to honouring the outcome of the process. This translates into an openness to changing one's mind and practices as a result of collective learning and deliberative exchange. Participants of deliberative processes are often persons who acknowledge a gap or shortcoming in a given policy or programme, whether they are practitioners, experts, rights-holders or professionals. The process will only be fruitful if there is openness to change and curiosity of others and the knowledge that they hold.

The proposed deliberative framework is intended as a flexible tool, and it is a work-in-progress that can benefit from research on new cases. It builds on what we, following Goertz and Mahoney (2012), might call counterfactual reasoning, where instead of seeking to empirically demonstrate the added value of deliberation, we highlight the costs of excluding or only superficially involving people in poverty in the policies that are intended to support them. In a similar vein, Saunders-Hastings and Reich (2024) have demonstrated the distorting effects of "starkly technocratic" orientations to philanthropic interventions (p. 247). We suggest that future research could build on this approach, mapping cases where the costs of non-participation are evident, and others where community involvement has helped to redress initial distortions (see e.g. the Williamsburg community-based study documented in Corburn, 2005).

6. Conclusion: advancing the 2030 agenda

In its report on "Science for achieving sustainable development" the Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the UN Secretary General (2019) reminds us that science is a powerful agent of change, for better or worse. Guided by the 2030 Agenda, which positioned the elimination of poverty as the first of seventeen sustainable development goals, the report makes a strong case for bridging the gap between knowledge and action, fostering multi-stakeholder co-production of knowledge from scientific and non-scientific sources – including lay, practical and indigenous knowledge – into innovative transformation pathways.

The framework we present in this article aims to provide guidance for evidence-based policies that seek to tackle poverty through co-

production. The growing body of work on epistemic injustice and radical epistemologies has brought the inequalities that persist in knowledge production processes to the fore. Many co-production attempts have demonstrated that it does not suffice to bring people together around the table to achieve deliberative equality (García-Espín, 2025); moreover, specific obstacles arise when seeking to involve people in extreme poverty in the co-production of knowledge with others.

Specifically, we know that "nonrecognition, misrecognition and disrespect", form part of "the typical experience of those in poverty" (Lister, 2002). These experiences reappear in the relational dynamics identified in the international report on the hidden dimensions of poverty. Our case studies show that when we take the recognition of people in poverty and their experiential knowledge as a starting point, and when we strive to achieve deliberative equality, our understanding of poverty can be significantly and simultaneously broadened and sharpened. We can, for instance, more effectively capture why a minimum income scheme suffers from high rates of non-take-up while fuelling growing mistrust of beneficiaries towards social workers and public administrations; why a model village planned with high hopes and numerous promises misses its targets; and why a policy designed to bring children off the streets backfires and further fragilizes their familial ties. The framework – and more broadly, the philosophy – we propose in this paper contributes, albeit modestly and with the limitations explained above, to sketching out a methodology for a democratic approach to development through deliberation.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Agathe Osinski: Writing – original draft, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Olivier De Schutter:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Xavier Godinot:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Methodology, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.107131.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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