

## Poverty

Contribution by anthropologists to issues such as poverty- Development anthropology- efforts by anthropologists to improve the well-being of people in the 'developing' countries, in areas such as healthcare, education and agriculture. Migration into urban areas is common as peasants search for better economic status. But most fail. Also, families loosen, religion declines in importance, interpersonal relationships become increasingly impersonal etc etc. For some urban immigrants, poverty and social isolation can precipitate a sense of hopelessness that prevents them from seizing whatever political, economic and educational opportunities may exist. (example- Comas; a shantytown in Peru).

In many cities, immigrants have banded together to form self-help groups called 'voluntary associations'- political, recreational, religious or occupational organisations through which individuals co-operate to achieve specific goals. Example- Nigeria's 'tribal unions' which provide social activity, financial support for jobless members, and help in times of illness or death. The movement of peasants to cities causes shanty towns (link to geo). A universally acceptable definition of poverty, one that does not rest on standards that apply only to some cultures, is almost impossible to provide. One reason is because many people around the world conduct at least part of their lives without using money. Some grow their own food; others barter for goods and services. Thus, using dollars to categorise either individuals or whole nations as rich or poor, while helpful in some contexts, is inadequate in others, and in some cases may be ethnocentric as well. Thus, poverty can not be adequately defined, cross-culturally, as the lack of particular material objects or of money. Instead it must be defined in terms of whatever is needed for adequate living in a particular cultural context. If, whatever their cultural setting, people lack any of the things they consider necessities in the context of their individual setting- and especially if they also lack the means to obtain those- then they can be considered impoverished. Poverty is a state of want rather than scarcity. Oscar Lewis coined the expression 'culture of poverty' for the ideas and behaviour poor people in some capitalist societies develop as they adapt to urban circumstances. Among the characteristics of the culture of poverty are a lack of involvement in the institutions of the wider society (except for the armed services, courts, prisons, and welfare organisations); financial circumstances that include a shortage of cash, lack of savings, borrowing, and pawning; inadequate education and virtual illiteracy, mistrust of the police and government; social relationships that include early experience with sex, widespread illegitimacy, wife abandonment, and mother-centred families and a lack of privacy. There are at least two different views of urban poverty. The first is that urban poor develop their own unique adaptation, fundamentally different from the larger society's way of doing things. The second is that the urban poor share many values of the larger society around them; their adaptation is different only because they lack the education and income to conform.

## About the Author

Source: <http://crampuppy.com>