**Anti-Poverty Policy and Shame in Diverse Societies  
Erika K. Gubrium[[1]](#footnote-1)**

***Abstract***

This report seeks to test the theoretical proposition that, while anti-poverty policies may mediate shame, they may also play a role in heightening the shame experienced by individuals living in poverty. The approach adopted is investigative, or inductive, because so little is known about direct associations between anti-poverty policy and shame across diverse cultures. The research reported is also inherently comparative in searching for similarities and distinctions. Earlier working papers have employed a maximum difference framework in China, India, Norway, Pakistan, the UK, and Uganda and have substantiated a robust (if culturally nuanced) relationship between shame and poverty in the varied settings chosen. This provides a good basis for focusing on and better formulating policy. The paper reports on analysis of public anti-poverty policy in the six settings to identify informative examples of how the framing, shaping and delivery of public policy may heighten or mitigate the shame experienced by policy recipients. The paper concludes with preliminary thoughts for shaping policy in order to maximize the dignity of recipients.

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**1 Introduction**

While the shame experienced by persons in poverty has long been recognised, little attention has been paid to the implications of the poverty-shame nexus for the design of effective anti-poverty measures. Shame is widely understood, along with embarrassment, pride and guilt, as a ‘self-conscious’ rather than a basic emotion, such as anger or fear (Cooley 1922, Tracy et al. 2007). Though culturally shaped and expressed, shame typically entails a negative assessment of the core self, made with reference to one’s own aspirations and the perceived expectations of others, that manifests itself in a sense of powerlessness and inadequacy and the feeling of ‘being small’ (Tracy et al. 2007). Indeed, social psychologists posit shame to be one of the most pernicious of emotions, creating a sense of powerlessness and incompetence arising from the fact that, unlike guilt, the cause of shame is not necessarily of a person’s own making and so cannot be assuaged through one’s own actions (Tangney/Dearing 2002).

As early as 1776, Adam Smith spoke of the ability to procure material goods as essential requirements for living in society without shame. Today, the accumulation of material wealth is commonly denoted as a symbol of success in the world; its deficiency is recognised as having detrimental social consequences. However, Lister (2004: 7) goes beyond material wealth, defining poverty as a ‘shameful and corrosive social relation’ characterised by a lack of voice, disrespect, humiliation and reduced dignity and self-esteem. Indeed, the meaning of poverty extends to identity. We establish who and what we are through social interaction (Mead 1934/2003). Who we are draws from, and reflects in complex ways, where we are in social life (Blumer 1969, Rose 1997). Shame is an emotion that arguably shapes and is shaped by one’s social status (Lynd 1958/1999, Scheff 2000). Studies in social psychology have demonstrated this, suggesting that the phenomenon of shame is both externally generated and internally felt (Adler and Adler 1993, Becker 1963, Goffman 1963).

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (1983) contends that shame is basic to the idea of poverty in *all* societies, despite differences in the availability of material resources and that shame decreases one’s capability to participate fully in society (Alkire 2002). Furthermore, certain forms of shame may strengthen social bonds while other forms have the potential to tear society apart (Scheff 2000). According to Scheff and Retzinger (1991), individuals experience anxiety when they face the threat of social separation. In this way, situations that increase the threat of social exclusion may create anxiety that manifests itself as guilt or shame. Conversely, shame may also result in feelings of worthlessness and increase the tendency to escape or disappear, as well as spawn maladaptive responses such as aggression, self-directed hostility and negative long-term behaviours (Fontaine *et al.* 2004, Jönsson and Starrin 2000, Tangney *et al.* 1996, Tangney *et al.* 2006). Within the context of poverty, Sen suggests that a key capability is one’s ability to live without shame, arguing that the experience of shame and being shamed or stigmatized may reduce one’s agency and capability to act, and as a result, may increase one’s social exclusion (Alkire, 2002).

Earlier working papers employing a maximum difference framework in urban China, India, Norway, Pakistan, the UK, and Uganda have, indeed, substantiated a robust (if culturally nuanced) relationship between shame and poverty in the varied settings chosen. The working papers furthermore demonstrate that shame frequently intersects with poverty in ways that exacerbate the harshness of the poverty experience. There are frequent instances in which shame leads to social withdrawal (with a resulting loss of social resources), the loss of morale and a loss of control resulting in anger (most frequently directed toward the government and/or welfare system), depression and despair. These phenomena may be further heightened via a cycle in which these responses drive people to take actions deemed irrational and socially unacceptable, adding to the sense of shame.

Notably, many of economically challenged respondents we spoke with linked a heightened sense of shame to their experiences as claimants of public anti-poverty schemes. This finding has profound policy implications: while anti-poverty policies may mediate shame, they may also play a role in heightening the shame experienced by individuals living in poverty. In light of these findings it is pertinent to explore the connection between the poverty-shame nexus and policy design and delivery. Attention to this dimension within the policy context may enhance the effectiveness of anti-poverty policy by promoting human dignity and social cohesion, along with fostering sustainable economic growth. To date, there are, however, a dearth of publications that systematically cover the issues of shame and anti-poverty policymaking and delivery within a social policy context. The field is currently dominated on the one hand by human psychology scholarship that explores the connection between poverty and shame/shaming and, on the other, by social policy scholarship analysing specific anti-poverty policy interventions (Alkire 2007). This working paper is a preliminary step to filling this gap and reports on research focused on the intersection between these two arenas of investigation.

Within each of the six settings, the policy samples varied widely, reflecting the variability in policymaking climates. The policies selected for representation in this report have all been publicly managed and financed. All have or had been introduced on a national level. While settings vary dramatically – in terms of political climate, fiscal resources, and cultural understandings of the role of welfare and of the state in welfare provision – it is possible that the two-way learning between Global South and North that has taken place in the first three work package reports is equally viable within the narrower domain of policy analysis. Furthermore, the inclusion of highly variable settings in this work package enables the identification of dignity-based principles that hold across highly variable borders as well as a preliminary conversation about the translatability of policies from one site to another.

The paper is divided into three principal findings sections. The first (section 2) explores the broader discursive context within which policymaking occurs. This section focuses on shifting definitions of poverty in each study setting. The second focuses on the shaping and delivery of policy, focusing on how shaming occurs via along a continuum of varying residualism reflected in anti-poverty design. Both sections draw upon the findings reported in WPs 1 and 2[[2]](#footnote-2) to add context to and further substantiate our claims concerning the ways in which shaming and stigmatization occur within the policy arena. The paper concludes with a third section that draws upon many of the issues and experiences described throughout in order to offer a preliminary analysis as to how we might move toward anti-poverty policies that heighten dignity rather than shame.

**2 Context: Shifting Poverty Focus**

Earlier reports suggested that in sites where abject poverty was still prevalent or recent the dominant focus on responsibility for poverty differed from sites where poverty was more relative and less absolute. This was reflected in the varying focus on persons living in poverty, as well as in the policy language used to describe them.

In settings such as India and Pakistan, massive corruption and social inequalities have led to a fragmented focus on the poverty issue. Pakistan’s story has been one of the shaming of low-income people via general policy neglect by ruling parties. The long period of colonial rule led to massive inequalities and a system of nepotism, followed by a period in which “pro-Growth sector policies” benefitted capitalist elites and increased income inequality, with almost no focus on redistribution and social protection. The promises attached to a democratic socialist backlash in the 1970s, wherein vast inequalities remained and yet a parallel stream of consciousness began to develop among low-income people wherein the rich were cast as shameful and the focus was on welfare rights. This alternate possibility was not realized due to a succession of wars and fiscal weakness. It was not until the 1980s that a series of discretionary and charity-based minimum social protection schemes were put into place in a system that has been heavily marked by corruption. Pakistan’s current scheme BISP offers limited assistance on the basis of political and administrative selection to around 18% of the population, and according to BISP estimates some 40% population is living below the poverty line. Coverage of an older assistance scheme, Zakat, is religion-specific and increasingly shrinking.

India’s social protection schemes have also been subject to nepotism and corruption and have adhered to shifting definitions of poverty over time. In this hierarchical society where societal rules are more pervasive than state-created rules, and where responsibility for these schemes have been at the regional and state levels, the definition of “poor” has been regionalized and driven by the clout and interests of certain regional level groups. Widely varying definitions of poverty over time and across regional areas have resulted in people feeling cheated by newly introduced eligibility criteria and by the potential for corruption. The corrupt and fragmented nature of the systems in Pakistan and India have led to varying experiences of shaming in each setting, described in more detail below.

The changing notion of poverty is perhaps most marked in a setting such as China, which has quickly moved from a planned to a market-based economy. In Communist era China, social provision was primarily employment-based via the “iron rice bowl” (*danwei*), under which all working-age urban residents were assigned long-term (lifetime?) jobs in state-owned or collective enterprises. References to poverty during this period were primarily limited to “households in difficulty”. Urban poverty was regarded as only a minor affliction confined to a small minority: either working individuals who faced challenges due to family issues (having numerous children or older dependents) or those persons who fell into the “3 noes” category (no reliable source of income, no ability to work and no family support). These groups were assisted by regular or irregular relief and perhaps experienced the shame of marginalization in an otherwise egalitarian society.

Economic liberalization in China has been accompanied by a focus on maintaining social stability and harmony. A concern with the “new urban poor” has emerged since the opening of the Chinese economy in the 1980s. This larger group has been affected by rising inequality and urban poverty has since emerged as a major social issue, especially as this poses a threat to “social stability”. The country’s new “full employment strategy” has been introduced to ensure the basic subsistence of the unemployed. In addition to a pension system, the Chinese *dibao* system (officially, the Minimum Standard of Living Scheme - 1999) provides a system of minimum relief via residual social assistance has since been targeted towards unemployed persons. Rhetorically, the system has aimed to be, as Premier Li Peng has stated: “an effective program that costs little but is beneficial to social stability”. An earlier report showed that a number of economically challenged urban respondents had had difficulty adapting to a decline in status: from the “glorified” master of the country to social assistance recipients. Some longed for the “good old days”, their sense of deprivation, discontent and social injustice high. Additionally, as the modernisation of the Chinese economy has been accompanied by the creation of vast income inequalities, this translated into heightened relative poverty. With modernisation and advanced capitalism and the growth of consumerism and individualism, poverty had increasingly come to have been seen as a personal failing, open to shaming because it was considered to be indicative of socially and economically dysfunctional behaviour, personally shameful because everyone was expected to be an economic success.

A prosperous economy combined with the broad extension of generous social insurance benefits has resulted in two paradoxes within the generous welfare state setting of Norway (Lødemel, 1997). It is broadly understood that social mobility has vastly increased in Norway with the rise of the welfare state in the 20th century, with the country ranked at the top of international comparisons and the themes of social mobility and egalitarianism a been strong part of the Norwegian public discourse for the past century. Indeed, broadly targeted welfare provisions introduced since WWII have lifted “deserving” risk groups out of social assistance or family dependency into various social insurance schemes. At the same time, however, the character of the system has resulted in the paradox that those individuals *not* eligible for – or perceived as “deserving of” – generous benefits are reduced to the few who are then eligible only for social assistance. Furthermore, the presence of a strong set of welfare protection offerings, linked with a focus on employability to shore up the system, has resulted in a heightened focus on the role of the individual actions in determining one’s status. An earlier report pointed to a second paradox reminiscent of the shame experienced by those who had not achieved success amidst new wealth in market-driven China. In Norway, however, it is the seemingly endless possibility for social mobility predicated upon the presence of a strong welfare state that has translated into a heightened sense of shame for those who have not fared so well. Earlier reports described how this shame has arisen from the dissonance between an expectation of mobility and the reality of constrained options for social assistance claimants. This is heightened by the structure and expectations tied to policy design, as described below.

In contrast to the five settings described above, Uganda’s story is one of unintended consequences. Uganda was and is still considered among the poorest countries in the world. The reduction of poverty and vulnerability has been an integral part of Uganda’s national development strategy and significant success has been attained over the past decade. This report reviews two anti-poverty schemes in Uganda. The first, the Universal Public Education reform (UPE) has offered the promise of a universally targeted and empowering welfare scheme, but has been undermined by lack of a solid infrastructure and hasty decision making. The second, the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS) has been introduced to increase market-oriented production via a strengthened extension delivery service, empowerment of local small land farmers, with a specific gender focus. The focus of this reform, however, has been overwhelmingly on the income aspect of poverty, which has been promoted ahead of a focus on the social aspects of poverty. As will be described below, the focus on income has stigmatized those farmers who have not qualified for this offering.

A review of those policies targeted towards individuals living in poverty suggests that the settings that are undergoing economic modernisation and/or building national welfare states have perhaps drawn inspiration from more established western welfare states. Policymakers in these newer welfare state settings grappling with a range of definitions, normative influences and regional needs, have prioritized many of the residualist tendencies of welfare schemes in the West targeted to low-income groups: 1) distinguishing between the categories “deserving” and “undeserving”, 2) imposed conditions by which one can claim benefits and 3) limited or decreased social citizenship for benefit recipients.

These three tenets have a long history in western welfare reform and can be traced back to the ideas encapsulated in Britain’s early Poor Laws, themes that heavily inform British policymaking and rhetoric concerning individuals living in poverty to this day. The British 1834 Poor Law ‘workhouse test’ denied help to the able-bodied unless they accepted accommodation under strict work-based regimes in conditions worse than those experienced by the poorest, independent worker. Drawing on individualised notions of responsibility and causality for poverty, the forced subsistence and limited social rights provided by this ‘self-acting test’ was designed to be dreadful for the recipient: its purpose, after all, was to limit fraud and establish the validity of a person’s claim to be destitute. The strategies of strict eligibility, conditionality and restricted social citizenship differentiated the undeserving from the deserving – this has been manifested throughout time in both established and newer welfare states and, according to our respondents, has been a source of shaming. Additionally, the format, level and strategy behind the calculation of benefits vary from setting to setting, but these elements have great significance for our respondents’ sense of wellbeing. The next section traces these elements within the welfare settings studied and the ways in which these trends may result in heightened shame for benefit recipients.

**3 Shaming through Policy Shaping and Delivery: A Continuum of Residualism**

Residualist welfare schemes have a long history in western welfare states. They tend to be seen as last-resort measures that maintain many of the stigmatizing and shaming characteristics of the 19th century Poor Laws. These types of schemes still exist in almost every developed welfare state as a supplement to broader and more generous social insurance programs and are characterized by a primary goal of economic growth and marked by strict, normatively based and discretionary eligibility rules, as well as limited coverage (Titmuss, 1974). In the UK and Norway, residualism has marked social assistance provision. While new, China’s *dibao* scheme is offered within the context of a broader array of higher tier benefits and many of its features represent what are arguably radical versions of the discretion, conditionality and limitations on social citizenship characteristic of comparable schemes in other settings. Within this sense, China’s scheme can be said to be hyper-residual. India’s and Pakistan’s comparable schemes are not strictly residual in the sense that a) they are relatively new and b) they can be said to represent the highest tier of the welfare offerings in each setting. While the element of discretionary eligibility was a serious issue, the absence of a broader welfare system had varying consequences on the claimant perceptions concerning the stigma and shame attached to benefit receipt.

The case of the Ugandan UPE is an important caveat to the more general critique of residualism offered within this report. Given universal eligibility, no conditionality, and the chance for vastly improved social citizenship the offer universal primary schooling should, from first glance, be a policy practice that is lauded for dignity building rather than for heightening user shame. Within the resource weak infrastructure of Uganda, however, the effect did not meet intentions and this case suggests that universalism as a general strategy may not translate to all settings.

*3.1 Discretion: deservingness and eligibility*

The preoccupation with distinguishing between ‘those we want to help’ and ‘those we don’t’ – has long been visible in policy language within the UK. This distinction has also long been reflected, if less viscerally so, within the Norwegian social assistance policy language. The 1834 Poor Law distinguished between the ‘poor’ – those who could not help themselves – and ‘paupers’ – the ‘able-bodied poor’ who chose not to help themselves. These undeserving groups were considered to be the ‘master evil’ of existing provisions. Norway’s 1964 Social Care Law, which replaced its own British-inspired Poor Law, but which, nonetheless, maintained many of its basic residualist elements, made explicit reference to ‘deservingness’ and echoed the idea of choice in its ‘help to self-help’ philosophy. Efforts in both Britain and Norway have consequently aimed primarily at reducing dependency on the welfare state by those who could ‘help themselves’.

In the UK, the trend has been towards creating stricter rules for eligibility to the category ‘deserving’, thus effectively creating a larger group of ‘undeserving’ claimants. In recent decades British government officials across the political aisle have consistently engaged in the practice of naming and shaming, with Conservative governments engaging in a discursive separation of welfare recipients from ‘us’, the ‘taxpayer’ and employing the metaphor of the state as a ‘nanny’ who must care for overly dependent recipients who are a ‘burden’ – to taxpayers and society at large. The ascendance of New Labour in the mid-1990s saw the continuation of this distinction in the idea that social security (‘welfare’) limited the money that would otherwise be available for government spending towards more deserving causes. The New Labour aim to reduce spending on welfare to divert resources to education and health (politically popular) reflected a hierarchy, wherein ‘welfare’ was the problem rather than the solution. The political rhetoric swirling around the new Universal Credit system (2013) recently introduced by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government has harshly demonized low-income groups with its fighting words against a ‘semi-permanent underclass’ and ‘intergenerational worklessness/poverty’. The newly introduced system has further blurred the lines between varying risk groups. Here, all benefit claimants have been cast as suspect and potentially undeserving. An earlier report related the level of poverty-induced shame to the Poor House strategy of forced minimal subsistence in order to be deemed eligible for income benefits. Respondents in the UK described their frustrations about being unable to achieve their material aspirations, and the challenges of making hard decisions between competing demands.

Norwegian social assistance law has, on the other hand, relied less on overt name-calling and has instead applied a strong work approach. Here, a further distinction of varying levels of deservingness has been made through the creation of new hierarchies within its residual social assistance system based largely on claimant employability. As a result, claimants have been divided into two groups via a discretionary caseworker evaluation of their work ability: those who are eligible to participate in a labour activation programme, the Qualification Programme (2007), and those who are not. Respondents in Norway considered receipt of social assistance to be demeaning, not least because they felt that it was assumed by society and caseworkers alike that they were needy, lazy and dependent. They described being placed close to the bottom of an institutional hierarchy of shame alongside people facing difficult times as drug users, lone parents and immigrants. One respondent described feeling negatively ‘categorized’ and having to ‘play a role’ in in which ‘the more pitiful you look, the more help you receive’. Another respondent spoke of his hesitance when first claiming social assistance for fear he would have to sell his car and apartment in order to qualify, actions he felt would mean lowering himself – and more importantly, his family – down the social hierarchy. Eligibility was clearly predicated upon one’s willingness to reduce one’s living conditions to near subsistence levels.

The eligibility criteria for entry into the Qualification Programme, on the other hand, were based on a vague notion of employability. Respondents who had not gained access to the Programme found these criteria confusing and suspect. One respondent described his frustration over a rejected application, noting that he was not in the Programme because he “wasn’t qualified” and instead would soon begin in a manual labour position with the local municipality. His descriptions suggested that he had internalized a sense of rejection in the fact that he was able enough to do free manual labour, but not enough to train for a long-term position.

The Chinese *dibao* system has taken the Poor Law emphasis on deservingness and neediness entering into discretionary eligibility decisions to an extreme. *Dibao* is available to those whose family income is lower than a locally determined poverty line. The data suggest that there is a general political understanding that the “deserving” poor – the elderly, children and persons with disabilities – have been entitled to receive social assistance. The “undeserving” poor have included those of working age who are physically fit to work but do not and those with a criminal record. The focus has overwhelmingly been on system “dependency” or “cheating”.

*Dibao* for all urban households is registered in a specified locality. The neighbourhood committee, a self-organized group handling public affairs in the local area, plays a distinctive role in the application review process. The committee’s familiarity with the particular situations of neighbourhood residents is thought to effectively to separate those who are “deserving” from those who are “undeserving”, but this structure is also possibly both invasive and stigmatizing. A review can include household visits and cases reviewed and reapproved at the minimum every six months. The challenge of verifying the income and assets of applicants relates to the debate on deserving versus undeserving and consumption level is variably taken into account when local committees determine eligibility. The expectation of minimum subsistence is prevalent in this setting as well. Among the criteria for receiving the benefit is that claimants cannot have a consumption level that is deemed as markedly higher than the local minimum standard of living. It is, however, up to local committees to determine what this standard should include. Thus, it may vary committee to committee whether “deserving” claimants may own cars, highly priced appliances, or, for instance, air conditioners.

The reliance on familiarity as a strategy for decision-making in the *dibao* system has meant that obtaining registration in a new location has been difficult (not least for the poor and socially disconnected), so in practice program eligibility has been confined to well-established local residents. Furthermore, in order to limit fraud, there is a community vetting process whereby the names of proposed claimants are displayed on notice boards and community members are encouraged to identify undeserving applicants. This has raised concerns about stigma effects and has had the potential to produce a sense of shame among those persons who await their peers’ evaluation concerning their deservingness.

Pakistan and India have had long histories of general neglect associated with poverties targeted towards most-vulnerable populations. For those minimum income policies that have arisen within the past several decades, claimant eligibility has been a matter of discretion by a middleman/bureaucrat who acts as a conduit between the claimant and the government. In both settings, the determination of eligibility has widely been acknowledged to be rife with corruption, both on the part of the claimant and that of the bureaucrat. The Pakistani government has introduced several national social relief policies since the 1980s, including the Zia-introduced religiously inspired social protection scheme, Zakat (1980), wherein state officials discretionarily award charitable benefits to low-income families and the social protection scheme BISP (2008), which focuses on the emancipation of low-income women. Zakat differentiates between two categories of people: the *Nisaab*, who tithe two and a half percent of their bank accounts yearly on the first day of Ramadan into a state fund and the *Mustahqeen*, recipients of economic assistance by way of belonging to a broad set of risk categories and/or those who cannot afford to pay the tithe. Similar to the “us” versus “them” suspicion that has recently been spread to the general receipt of welfare benefits in the UK, the simple division of social welfare in Pakistan has been into the givers and the receivers. In the eyes of the general public, suspected misusers of Zakat are guilty not only of fraud, but also of a major sin. Within the setting of a fairly orthodox society, the religious overtones that are attached to discretionary interpretations of claimants’ intentions have served to stigmatise, shame and/or threaten the identity of claimants. According to several respondents, the absence of a standard state interpretation concerning eligibility caused a great strain on even the rightful recipients, who became self-conscious of this scrutiny and their uncertain image in the eyes of the wider society.

Pakistan’s BISP scheme, which has had the lofty policy promise of empowering low income women by awarding economic benefits directly to them, has, however, been limited to *married* women, imposing a moral judgment against single women and single mothers and adding to the shaming that occurs via policy neglect of these groups. Evidence shows that the identification of BISP beneficiaries has been deeply politicized and corrupt, resulting in a system in which low-income women (often with few resources/social networks) must themselves bribe officials or must beg their husbands to do so. One female respondent mentioned having to do free cleaning work for four months at a house belonging to the relative of someone with influence in choosing recipients. She described as shaming the discretionary authority that parliamentarians had over the award her benefit and the necessity of convincing a parliamentarian to choose her. Within this setting, the power that the middleman had over the claimant was directly felt and the humiliation of a forced exchange of work for a potential benefit *before* the granting of eligibility perhaps heightened the shame of this respondent.

According to India’s National Social Assistance Programme (1995), being classified as a “poor” household has meant that one is eligible for large array of benefits, including a flat, non-contributable pension and a one-time benefit. Every five years a ‘Below the Poverty Line’ (BPL) register has been compiled that lists the names of people who are eligible for access to various government schemes. A recent policy concerning scoring criteria (2011) has had local gatekeepers (community member middlemen) awarding particular numbers of points to certain categorical dimensions when determining who is falls below this line. Those persons determined to be poor and thus eligible for benefits have received a certificate stating that they are “poor”.

Interestingly, while the meagre benefit and eligibility criteria make this a “poor people’s programme”, earlier findings suggest that – in contrast to the findings in Pakistan – the role of political patronage in determining access to benefits has resulted in the displacement of shame for those who *can* access the benefit via bribery or corruption. In Pakistan claimant shame draws from the religious sanction against bribery and fraud. Since a vast majority of the society is ideologically religious (if not in practice), it is almost impossible to take pride in “working the system. Despite genuinely considering themselves eligible, those who are cheating the system to be on the welfare rolls would either not admit or likely to be apologetic about it. In contrast, minimum income provision in India is not deeply imbued with religious significance. One’s ability to “work” the corrupt system is not a moral sin, but instead is reportedly seen as an achievement and possibly as a marker of one’s social connections, despite one’s lack of economic resources. Indian respondents did not describe shame experienced within context of availing government schemes. Rather respondents described a situation in which, due to the heavy competition that existed to get on the BPL list, being identified as ‘impoverished’ meant that one had been able to outsmart the system. Thus, within this setting the stigma and shame attached to benefit receipt ironically seemed to be trumped by the salience of corruption. All the same, this situation created a new out-group of those who *could not* access the benefit, possibly resulting in increased shame for these individuals.

While several Chinese respondents described having felt reluctant to submitting the MSLS application and noted the tedious nature of the application process, it is interesting that, despite the seemingly draconian eligibility process associated with the granting of *dibao*, the Chinese respondents less frequently described a sense of shame or shaming connected with this process in contrast to respondents in most of the other settings. As with India, this finding may be explained in part by the fact that respondents were drawn mostly from a population of individuals who *had* managed to access benefits within the context of general low coverage. The low level of coverage by *dibao* has been a widely acknowledged problem. Despite the programme’s broad aims, the benefit has only reached about one-quarter of those households with an income below the *Dibao* line. As was the case in India, the involvement of local community members in decisions concerning the award of benefits may have meant that those individuals who had – after a tedious effort – been deemed deserving/eligible for benefits to internalize this sense of deservingness. Thus, shame for those respondents who gained access may have been displaced via the very arduous nature of the process. As with India, the Chinese findings beg the question of the sorts of shame and heightened marginalization that are then experienced by the large number of persons who have *not* been deemed eligible for benefits.

*3.2 Caveat: Universalism and the UPE*

While most of the policies described in the six settings were discretionary and means-tested, the Universal Public Education (UPE, 1997) programme in Uganda has been an exception to the rule. While the rhetoric framing this policy has been all-inclusive and universal in nature, this has reflected a cynical attempt by the incumbent government to appeal to a populist sentiment among voters. The rapid implementation of the UPE reform was based on political demand over rational planning and it was done without time for detailed planning and in the absence of sufficient baseline data. Within this context, the universalist strategy associated with primary school provision has undermined the reform. Without infrastructural resources to back up this lofty goal, the demand for education has resulted in ‘access shock’ and the weak central infrastructure has been too overwhelmed to soundly respond. As a result, the quality of education offered by UPE schools has eroded dramatically. This has been catastrophic for poor children in rural UPE schools as their parents of the poor children have had no option but to enrol their children in schools that have come to be considered shameful even by local rural standards. Economically challenged respondents described these schools as shameful options of last resort.

In contrast to the broader discourses within the UK and Norway, wherein those persons on the lowest end of the welfare spectrum were frequently suspect as being the least deserving, the political discourse attached to the UPE reform began with a focus on universal provision wherein *all* primary school age children were deserving and eligible. The reform began with the public description of the schools as representing *Bonabasome* (“education for all”). This rhetoric, however, shifted as access shock set in and the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni charged that rich families should send their children to private schools. While Museveni cast economically challenged families as ‘deserving’ and most eligible for UPE schools, this distinction has had the opposing effect of attaching stigma to the UPE schools. With this shift in definition concerning eligibility and deservingness has come a rhetorical shift concerning the schools themselves, as they have cime to be described publicly as *Bonabakone* (‘illiteracy/ mediocrity for all’, but literally, ‘food you cannot eat’). The respondents who sent their children to this school found this rhetoric particularly shaming.

Despite a ranking as one of the world’s poorest nations, respondents described a setting in which relative economic and social status was strongly felt. As eligibility to UPE was universal, access to primary education was no longer an issue after UPE. What was at issue was access to quality education. This particular Ugandan reform thus represents a story of unintended consequences in which the fundamental assumption of universal poverty has been flawed and the effort to provide universally targeted reforms largely undermined by an inadequate infrastructure to realize these goals.

As with the UPE reform, Uganda’s NAADS reform has also failed to acknowledge the social aspects of poverty and has overwhelmingly focused on the income aspect. The NAADS target group has been stated as the ‘economically active poor’ who can ‘thrive’ given the offered interventions and can ‘survive in market economies’. This is in contrast to a focus on the most destitute farmers. The challenge for NAADS coordinators has been to discern between ‘economically active poor’, ‘economically active non-poor’ and ‘economically non-active poor’. In the end, farmers must possess a certain level of agricultural resources and, in some places, social capital in order to qualify for the offering. The eligibility criteria associated with this offering has thus created new categories of deserving and undeserving and has excluded those who are poorest and most in need.

*3.3 Conditionality*

Conditionality in residual welfare consists of the behaviours that claimants must engage in as a necessary condition for the receipt of benefits. These conditions have been visualized in three, often mutually reinforcing, ways: as part of a contract between government and claimant (White, 2003), as being in the longer term interests of the claimants themselves (Mead, 1997) and as necessary to create the conditions under which individuals can both fulfil their own potential and help others to realize theirs (Selznick, 1998). While the policies in focus from India and Uganda did not pose specific conditions to the receipt of benefits or offerings, those in the other settings did and this was a source of shaming for respondents within each.

Earlier reports substantiated an overwhelming focus on work in the dominant social norms of Norway and the UK and how responsibility for one’s situation was placed with wholly with the individual. Within the policy arena, this has been reflected in these countries by a focus on providing the correct (dis)incentive-based calculus regarding benefits in Norway and UK lest claimants seemingly choose unemployment or fall into a long-term ‘poverty trap’. Drawing from Poor Law ideology, the New Labour Party focused on the use of disincentives in conjunction with the imposition of work conditions to promote agency, with the idea that abuse would occur unless claimants were closely monitored for behaviour. The British Jobseeker’s Allowance (1996) introduced the disincentive of lower out of work benefits along with a new contractual relationship between claimants and the state focusing on the work-focused duties and obligations of the claimant. At the same time, the state’s obligations were weakened from ‘security’ to ‘support’. An increased focus on rights and duties was also reflected in the 1997 Party manifesto, which followed Lawrence Mead’s ‘new paternalism’ ideas, in which work/workfare was a condition of citizenship, as well as Amitai Etzioni’s communitarian principles of obligations and duties. An earlier report showed that in the British benefit system respondents found the rules and regulations to be sometimes petty, often dehumanising, and increasingly punitive. They described feeling that they had been lumped together in the ‘crackdown’ on supposed exploitation of the benefit system.

Like the UK, Norwegian policymaking regarding social assistance has long focused on a rights and duties principle, first using this as the rationale for workfare and later applying in the form of a contract between claimant and welfare state. An early version of this approach was seen in Norway’s 1964 Social Care Act (*Lov om sosial omsorg*), which introduced a reformed assistance scheme for individuals in need of economic support that replaced the country’s Poor Law. The Act included a specific ‘help to self-help’ ambition for individuals of employable age, along with a work approach directing claimants to improve their qualifications and actively seek work via an explicit focus on ‘rights and duties’. Since the early 1990s, this principle has taken form through the encouragement of municipal social workers to require claimants to participate in work-seeking activities, training or skills-building measures in exchange for benefits – these activities have primarily taken shape within the social assistance arena in the form of workfare arrangements for local municipalities. Norwegian respondents on regular social assistance linked a lowered self-image to the fact that they did not have jobs as many wanted and were expected to have. One respondent expressed frustration at the meaningless unpaid task she had been assigned to spooling thread at a factory, noting that what had been described by her caseworker as a form of therapy had for her been an exercise in boredom and irritation. The lack of real job opportunities led to frustration, a sense of hopelessness and, perhaps among a number of the Norwegian respondents, a growing alienation from the full employment norms of mainstream society.

Norway’s 2007 Qualification Programme has explicitly operationalized the requirement to engage in activities that had been merely encouraged within the municipalities since the early 1990s. In contrast to the UK, however, increased duties have been met with new rights for Programme participants in the form of higher, regular benefits, a broader programmatic offering and follow-up by one caseworker. The Norwegian respondents who were engaged in this Programme were, on the whole, less negative about the presence of work conditions as they were accompanied by an institutional expectation that one was moving toward regular, wage-earning employment. Some respondents were, in fact, quite positive about the possibility that they would find work via the internships offered through the Qualification Programme and described how these new opportunities had enabled them to feel a new sense of strength. One Programme participant noted that it was the ‘first time’ he had noticed ‘any interest in helping me find the right direction’. It is perhaps not surprising that respondents were positive about the condition to work given the overwhelming focus on employment in the Norwegian welfare system and the strong Protestant work ethic dominating Norwegian society at large.

Despite several positive experiences, evaluations of pilot programmes leading to the Programme have reported that the conditionality that has taken shape via a work approach has not been appropriate for many of the Programme’s target group members, many of whom were and are beset by a complex set of physical and mental health issues. Policymakers have been critiqued for relying upon an oversimplified assumption that individually targeted incentives and sanctions are the appropriate stimuli to move claimants into work, as well as for their failure to recognize larger structural challenges claimants face. Here, an approach framed as a right and incentive for a select group of eligible claimants might in the end be experienced as a punitive measure.Several respondents who had been placed on internship schemes echoed this sentiment, describing their positions as means for exploitation, yet all the same internalizing a sense of shame concerning the seemingly mysterious flaws that had prevented them from obtaining wage-earning work.

As with the process of discerning eligibility, the placement of conditions on the receipt of *dibao* in China went beyond those placed in other settings. In addition to lifestyle prohibitions (no gambling, no use of drugs, no prostitution) were reported various value-laden reasons for disqualification, including that a claimant had violated the Marriage Law, Adoption Law, or Family Planning Law or had refused a job offer without legitimate reasons. Those who were of working age and physically able were required to seek employment for three periods prior to seeking MSLS. Furthermore, in exchange for receiving *dibao* claimants were expected to engage in workfare style community service. An earlier report suggested that these criteria were potentially shaming for some claimants. One respondent, for instance, described the humiliation that she had experienced when forced to provide documentary evidence as to why a potential employer had not considered her fit for a position in her previous job searches.

*3.4 Restricted social citizenship*

T.H. Marshall’s (1950/1992) notion of social citizenship includes “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society” (p.8). An earlier report showed that respondents described a poverty-shaming nexus that was as much based on a failure to meet basic necessities as it was one’s lack of ability to meet the social conventions and institutions particular to the societies in which they lived. In addition to a limited ability to engage in normal social participation – suggestive of social exclusion –respondents also frequently described a loss of social citizenship rights. This restriction of rights was less a matter of access and more a matter of the altered social identities, rights and expectations they possessed in connection with their economic challenges, felt most keenly in some sites within the context of their identities as recipients of public aid or residual welfare benefits. Respondents noted that the sense of failure they experienced in not living up to their own expectations was heightened by the lack of value they felt they had in the eyes of the welfare institutions from which they received support.

In the UK, reduced social citizenship for claimants has been reflected in a policy discourse of norms of claimants being ‘not playing their part’ and having to be tempted with the right ‘incentives’ or threatened by the right sanctions in order to be led into work. Once again drawing from Poor Law ideology in which recipients lost social citizenship rights in exchange for benefits, the discourse surrounding the new Universal Credit scheme has described claimants as ‘slacking’, ‘not playing their part’ and a ‘burden on the taxpayer’. Respondents have described feelings of disenfranchisement relating to this discourse.

While Chinese policy rhetoric at the *national* level does not speak of claimants in such an explicitly negative tone it does consistently focus on maintaining ‘social stability’. Dorothy Solinger (2008) has reported on local instances in which the new urban poor in China have been described as a ‘burden’ on the country’s newly liberalized economic sector. Within this context, many claimants had moved from a status as active social participants via the *danwei* to the more negative status of social burden and challenge to social stability. Many of the *dibao* claimants interviewed saw themselves as victims of social transformation. An earlier report showed that respondents in China, who as employees of state owned enterprises had once been part of the vanguard of worker class enjoying high status as ‘masters of the state’, now had largely to be content with low paying, insecure occupations because they lacked the entrepreneurial skills demanded by the reformed Chinese economy. They were angry at their lowered social status post-economic reform and questioned the rapidly increasing economic disparity in China. In this context, these claimants perceived *dibao* as a minimum means of compensating their loss of economic and social status. The constant reminder of their lowly status and seeming powerlessness to do anything about it was perhaps a marker of reduced rights as full social participants in the new market economy.

An earlier report notes that Norwegian respondents were not only failing in relation to their own aspirations, they were also dependent on the state’s welfare agency and hence on society as a whole, as one respondent described it: they were considered ‘parasites’. Regular social assistance is a temporary, last-resort scheme with benefits that are discretionary and which aim for basic subsistence. As described above, a new hierarchy has been created within Norway’s social assistance system and this is reflected in new symbolic social citizen rights and duties for those persons placed on the higher tier.

In contrast to social assistance ‘recipients’, those persons selected for the Qualification Programme have officially been termed ‘participants’ and, tied to this identity comes expectations of a more active status in addition to the higher, more stable benefit. Moreover, unlike the regular social assistance benefit, the Qualification Benefit is taxed, pension accruing and is paid out by the local municipality, rather than Norway’s welfare agency. For respondents, the source of their check they received as well as the fact that they were giving back to the welfare state in the form of taxes and social participants in the form of pension earners was a crucial element in what they characterized as a move toward ‘normal’. Norwegian respondents contrasted the fact that they received a wage and that they were ‘contributing’ with their previous experience as a social assistance clients which one respondent described as having had ‘everything stolen from you; you’re not a participant in society, you’re only a burden’.

The Ugandan NAADS programme has also limited the social mobilization and cohesion of its participants. It operates via groups formed by external committee and extension training that the farmers participating in the programme received was also top-down. Less economically secure participants saw the programme as having been taken over by larger scale farmers with more resources. Poorer farmers reported an inability to voice their own concerns in meetings, as they were ridiculed by better off members within this setting. The respondents linked a sense of shaming and heightened feeling of disempowerment to what they described as an explicit limit on their ability to be full participants in the decision-making processes affecting them.

The issue of restricted social citizenship for persons living in poverty in India and Pakistan is perhaps a different matter than in the other settings. Within these settings many of the risk factors tied to poverty have simultaneously been tied to one’s caste, gender, religion, or regional origin. The social citizenship of those individuals targeted for schemes such as India’s National Social Assistance Programme and Pakistan’s Zakat and BISP programmes has perhaps long been limited due to the strong social hierarchy that has persisted for centuries. Within this respect it is possible that, while these programmes may, indeed, increase the visibility of persons who are economically challenged and thus cause them to experience shame, the newer visibility they have gained via the broader acknowledgment that poverty is an issue to be addressed may also have been a means for the groups without previous resources or voice to emerge from a long history of widespread neglect.

1. **Dignity-based policy: preliminary thoughts**

Economic liberalization has been accompanied in western settings such as the UK and Norway by what Tony Judt (2007, as cited in Solinger, 2008) has described as the residualist tenets of “modern welfare reform”: strict eligibility, conditionality and reduced social citizenship. The more recently economically liberalized setting of China has taken these ideas to an extreme. While last-resort, social assistance schemes may have helped to lift economically challenged groups out of absolute poverty, the normative distinctions made in determining who is eligible for specific benefits and under which conditions have resulted in the creation of new social hierarchies in which claimants have experienced heightened stigmatization attached to restrictions on their social rights.

Both Pakistani and Indian policymaking must be considered within the context of social rules that often outweigh the efforts of the state. Within these settings where one’s regional origin, religion, gender and caste are variably associated with poverty and shame, it is clearly difficult to diminish inequities via state policies focused on income alone. The evidence presented here, however, suggests that this principle holds true to varying extents in the other settings studied as well, including in the strong welfare state setting of Norway.

Residualist welfare policies – with their focus on strict eligibility rules that discern between deserving and undeserving, their imposition of conditionality and their tendency to pose limitations on social citizenship – are, by their very nature and aim, shaming for benefit recipients. High-income countries such as Norway and the UK – as well as, increasingly, China – have a cultural predisposition to status largely tied to material consumption, yet the respondents we spoke with were subject to policies that provided only minimum funding and in return expected them to live in subsistence conditions while engaging in productive activity. It is indeed worth asking if the attempt to provide as little as possible is an effective strategy for groups of people who either are unable to find decently paying work or have a complex set of issues that prevent them from working. The experiences and descriptions of our respondents in these countries suggest that, in fact, many experienced their everyday lives as a sort of catch-22 in which they did not have the health, resources, skills, or access to work necessary to make ends meet and yet were punished – economically and socially – precisely for this difficulty.

The recommendations by user-based organizations in Norway provide a glimpse of another way that is possible within the setting of high-income countries. The Qualification Programme has offered a higher income to eligible social assistance claimants and yet the incentive to work or engage in meaningful activity has not been weakened. On the contrary, many of the respondents who were engaged in the Programme suggested that they no longer had to spend time making ends meet, and this had given them the physical and mental energy to begin to plan for the short and longer-term. The recommendation of a state index-based universal basic income for all residents/citizens would go a long way towards minimizing the challenges and frustrations experienced. As the Qualification Programme has successfully shown, consideration should be given to the format of the benefit so that claimants, too, can contribute to the tax system and plan for their futures. This sort of move to the full participatory activity expected of a country’s citizens moves towards Sen’s notion of capabilities. Additionally, the Norwegian case suggests that – above a certain benefit threshold – the source of the benefit may be as important as the level, and elements that increase the social citizenship of claimants may also rebuild claimant dignity.

Given the harsh media depiction and discourse concerning low-income persons in the UK, it is not surprising that social assistance claimants experience some amount of shame in connection with their status as recipients of last-resort aid. Why, however, do the Norwegian respondents we spoke with speak so clearly about the shame they experience when gaining access to or receiving state-provided benefits, whereas the Indian and Chinese recipients spoke very little about shame within this particular context? After all, in adjusted monetary terms, Norwegian claimants receive a significantly higher level of economic support, are not subject to invasive house searches, and do not need to bribe a middleman for benefits. This difference points to two factors to keep in mind when evaluating policy: the broader welfare state context and the issue of benefit coverage.

National narratives, norms and sociocultural rules are a strong component of the social mix that claimants operate within when receiving benefits. An earlier report noted that Norwegian claimants, living in a strong welfare state where everyone was seemingly doing well, had experienced heightened shame in part due to their extremely marginalized position in society and within the hierarchy of the national welfare institution. Claimants in China also described feeling had marginalized, however. When respondents described shame this was largely in relation to their fall in status after economic liberalization. These individuals had not reaped the rewards of broader economic prosperity: respondents described the vast economic inequities as a troubling and rather new experience. That said, perhaps shame was less frequently tied specifically to the receipt of benefits, as those respondents we spoke with in India and China had managed the infrequently possible – to finally gain access to benefits, after varying levels of gruelling effort. Perhaps these recipients are similar to the Qualification Programme participants in Norway, whom had moved up the welfare hierarchy into a more comfortable “deserving” category and have reported less frequent shame in contrast to their counterparts still on regular social assistance. What then of the experience of the many economically challenged individuals in India and China who have not gained access to benefits? The issue of coverage is a crucial issue in these settings.

What, then, to do in those countries whose economies do not place them in the high-income category, yet which have begun to develop national anti-poverty approaches? Should benefits and services be provided universally or should they target those individuals with the most challenged capabilities? The Ugandan story of the UPE suggests that universal coverage in and of itself is not the answer to shame question. The UPE reflects a policy orientation that was allowed political demand to override rational planning. Policy makers did not consider the social reality that government-aided schools were already used by (and affordable for) well-to-do families. Additionally, national resources were put into covering the cost of school, but did not cover the costs of the items (clothing, school supplies, bag lunches) necessary for students from economically challenged families to fit in with the socioeconomic expectations of the broader student population. The Ugandan UPE story is a caveat that universal provision may have drawbacks if not developed with existing social hierarchies in mind, much less without proper infrastructural backup. Within this low-capacity setting, it is possible that targeting high-quality benefits is better for the longer-term improvement of the social and economic status of recipients. In improving policy with dignity in mind, the matter of structural resources and coverage of social assistance policies make a difference. This comes down to the challenge of equity vs. equality – a challenge that is particularly strong in newer welfare states, where the infrastructure might not be there and/or where social inequalities are a deep part of the social fabric.

An earlier report suggested that women and children in all settings were especially likely to bear the brunt of poverty related shame. In the case of women this reflected both their dominant role in domestic budgeting and their vulnerability in patriarchal societies. Within this context, those policies that focused on the empowerment of women would seem to have mitigated poverty-induced shame. Pakistan’s BISP scheme (2008) has focused on the emancipation of women and it is women who directly receive the benefit. Women’s control over this economic benefit, once accessed, is emancipatory for a group with relatively little autonomy. Here, the strategy of targeting this “deserving” group did not add to the stigma of the claimants, however, the process for gaining access did. However, in many cases, the combination of discretion aimed at female claimants was particularly shameful as these individuals were subject to a heightened visibility – as women and as impoverished – that was fraught with stigma. When deciding the process of applying for and accessing benefits, policymakers must consider the issue of the potentially stigmatized visibility of vulnerable groups.

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1. *This draft paper draws on collaborative research undertaken by the following colleagues but the interpretation presented in this paper is that of the author and not necessarily that of the research team*

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2. The bulk of the interpretations of findings described from work packages 1 and 2 have been drawn from synthesis reports authored by Robert Walker, which themselves draw on data provided by the research teams at each study site. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)