

MOVEMENTS TOWARD A FUTURE RESEARCH ON THE INFORMAL ECONOMY - PROBABLY NEEDING INTER- / TRANS-DISCIPLINARY FIELD RESEARCH

Preliminaries:

Is it either/or? Do we as researchers have to trade off insights into - on the one hand - processes, the necessary specificity of local conditions faced with local and general processes – with on the other the generalisable conclusions obtained from (official) data sets and models producing results which may be ‘rigorously’ compared?

Much discussion of and definition of terms at this conference – terms must have a relation to theory – our era is one in which a thousand theoretical flowers bloom – many words for the same thing and same word means many things. General phenomenon not confined to informal economy.

Is our theory to be driven by official data classifications?

Juan Carlos: A camel is a horse designed by a committee.

Camel: body of the beast – was this a research agenda conference or a very rich research conference?

Veterinary services: dutiful / objective rapporteur / pet agenda / recapitulation of what hasn’t been discussed / suggestions about what’s omitted from the research omitted here / trusteeship for toiling poor.

1. Research to serve informal labour in its struggles

Is labour struggling for the objectives we think it has?

So a content analysis of workers’ union bulletins -2009-10)

Resistance to social and political forces holding wages down

1.1. Competition

Increasing labour exploitation through deteriorating terms (long hours , low pay, attacks on working day, minimum wages, PF, regular work, contractualisation, delayed payments, neo-bondage, attacks on unionisation, dispute resolution) and conditions (health and safety)

Technological change, labour displacement and compensation

1.2 Theatres of collusion in low wage norms

1.3 Commodification – ‘innovation’ / creation of new commodities and new fields of profit or invasion of spheres where other values held sway – now using familiar old contractual technologies of insecurity.

Innovation almost always ahead of regulation; state regulation then having to deal with informal institutions of regulation – such that regulation is always a battleground.

2. *Research to serve self-employed people in resisting their constrained ability to save, invest and expand.*

Exchange relations and adverse modes of incorporation in market circuits.

Exploitation + oppression + extortion.

The informal economy involves petty and not so petty capital.

2.1 Agriculture- e.,g. relations of subordination to commodity and money markets, interlocked contracts;

2.2 Non agriculture – e.g. shedding of risk and cost, payment asymmetries, sites of work, physical conditions (think mining)

2.3 Direct attacks on peoples' resource bases – cities beautiful – forests – land – marine and aquatic resources

2.4 Social identity as a collective base for solidarity / means of oppression / constraint on 'choices'. Organisation and its politics – necessary, its scope = incomplete, arbitrary.

3. Watchtower over state policies directly and indirectly affecting labour in informal economy.

Tax, property, commercial law, contract, labour law, land use and planning, (ask dalit businessmen and they add extortion for licences; brick wall of banking system, harassment by the police; practices of extortion and protection)

Technologies of bureaucratic practice and power;

Developmental state versus commodified state.

Communication of such understandings with working people.

4. Research to support informal economy workers outside work –

Productive sphere

4.1 Displacement, Timepass, un and underemployment, very incomplete citizenship/adulthood

reproductive sphere

4.2 Profiling and reducing the treble burden of women

4.3 Modes of access to entitlements, and public utilities (social)security, food, water, sanitation, electricity, habitat, (public) transport, health and education) – rather more than Beveridge's 1940s Five Great Wants

5. Biggest problem of 21st century – climate change – denial – research in silos

5.1 Research to guide protection of labour in informal economy from extreme events – shocks and contingencies now include catastrophic encounters between social and physical systems as well as economic and political shocks.

5.2 Democratising research to empower wage labour, self employed and family labour in the new agricultural and industrial revolution

5.3. Technological scale-down / scale-up and collective action

5.4. Sequencing – energy; energy efficiency- homes and buildings; transport; industry ; agriculture; education

5.5 Role of informal economy in waste economy and restitution - guiding the engineering of bio-physical-economic systems