International Poverty Law/Poverty Law

At an International Poverty Law workshop convened by the LEGVPU on October 21, 2014, participants highlighted that poverty cannot be eradicated unless the background rules that maintain existing structures of economic inequality and persistent poverty are critically audited, and where necessary revised. Speakers explained how governments establish inequitable entitlements such as according private property protections to companies and extractive industries which impose unfair burdens on surrounding communities. Participants further emphasized how concepts such as “equal opportunity” that are sometimes introduced to address poverty actually sustain economic inequalities because they ignore the historical imbalances created by pre-existing legal rules. The workshop concluded that legal rules are deeply implicated in maintaining and strengthening the status quo, power and wealth inequalities that reinforce substantial poverty world-wide. The workshop participants welcomed the World Bank’s introduction of a Systematic Country Diagnostic Tool (SCDT) as a precursor for preparing the Country Partnership Frameworks to anchor the World Bank’s assistance to countries given the SCDT potential role in identifying laws and institutions which are critical in poverty reduction. The Community of Practice on International Poverty Law (CoPI), which will be launched on November 19, 2015 as part of the Global Forum on Law, Justice and Development, is a new initiative and will be building on these efforts.

Objectives and Priorities of the Community of Practice

The objective of the CoPI is to create a forum for dialogue among lawyers, development practitioners, and community figures regarding how background legal rules may reinforce inequality if left unaddressed. The CoPI aims at increasing the understanding of the impact of law on poverty by creating a network of professionals who can share knowledge on ongoing and new initiatives. A first step will be to:

- (a) establish an open platform through which the members can share updates and best practices on the relevant legal and policy developments;
- (b) provide a space to facilitate dialogue between academics, practitioners and policy makers.

The platform will provide an easy access, low threshold test-ground for members to gauge interest in specific proposals, share new initiatives, and disseminate research findings and other relevant activities and outputs. To focus the activities of the CoPI, a number of themes and issues will be identified during the CoPI launch and follow up meetings. Some of these may include:

(i) analysis of existing work and identification of gaps,
(ii) the creation of a list serve;
(iii) the establishment of a website which can link into ongoing work of the GP on Poverty; and
(iv) the planning of two meetings (Spring 2016 and Fall 2016) – agenda, format and themes of which have yet to be set.
One of the initiatives of the CoPI will be to review a sample of the SCDTs to identify the role of national legal systems and laws in promoting equality and reducing poverty.

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