



International Sociological Association

Working Group on Famine and
Society - WG05

Newsletter

WG05 Famine and Society

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From the Editor

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Board of WG-05 (Famine and Society), I wish to formally welcome you to the WG-05 of the International Sociological Association (ISA). It is the intention of WG-05 to become one of the most active committees of the ISA and as such we look forward to your participation in planning activities.

The current issue of the *Newsletter* contains the following:

1. A brief history of the formation of WG-05;
2. Current aims of WG-05;
3. Members of the Board;
4. Decisions taken during the XVI World Congress of Sociology held from 23 to 27 July 2006;
5. Mid-term conferences;
6. Members of WG-05; and
7. Future activities.

A brief history of the formation of WG-05 by Amritha Rangasami – Past President of WG-05

The Seventies saw the commencement of a debate in the Social Sciences on poverty and famine. A. K. Sen's paper in the *Cambridge Economic Quarterly* and in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, the setting up of a Famine study Group in the International Association in Geography, the Anthropological Association's Task Force on famine, research studies undertaken at the *Institut Français de Scientefic pour le developpement et cooperacion* in Paris, Rural Sociology's inclusion of 'famine' as a topic in its conferences and studies, History's monumental research project headed by Prof Michel Mollat in Paris, to cite only a few established worldwide academic interest.

In India research was initiated by the Indian Council of Social Science Research and supported by the Department of Sociology in the University of Delhi with a senior fellowship for Amrita Rangasami. She published a number of papers questioning approaches in history, (McAlpin, M.) Anthropology (Firth R.) and Economics (Sen) the latter on a request from Suzy Paine then associated with the *Cambridge Economic Quarterly* who sent her Sen's paper for review. It led to the need for initiating the debate in Sociology as well. An opportunity presented itself when the ISA met in Delhi for the Eleventh World Congress in 1986. An ad hoc group came into being. The response to the meeting at the Congress was overwhelming and it was clear that the study of famine in sociology would be welcomed.

The group met again on 31 January 1987 in New Delhi. It brought together Jean Floud from the University of Oxford, Prof. Oommen, Rangasami and others. Even at the first meeting a reformulation in approaches to famine studies in the Social Sciences was agreed upon. A statement of purpose was drawn up. It read as follows:

Preamble

We the members of the Working Group formed for the study of Famine and Society seek recognition under Article II of the International Sociological Association.

Justification and Objectives

The constitution of an ad hoc research committee in 1985 had the following objectives:

1. To explore and develop a systematic study of societies within which starvation affects social, political and economic institutions and brings about economic and social decline and adverse biological and social and cultural consequences to large communities.
2. To examine critically the definition in the Social Sciences of famine which must be viewed as a sudden collapse and which recognizes the presence of famine, primarily with reference to disease, mortality and demographic change.
3. To promote the study of famine as a social process rather than as an isolated event and to investigate the social economic and political characteristics and determinants to evolve a coherent social framework to study famine in all its aspects.

This statement of purpose was sent in subsequent years to all those who wished to join 'famine and society', to sign and return. Prof Barbara Harriss, Prof Michael Watts U.K, Prof Hans Bohle, Prof Elwert, Dr Anna Lou de Havenon, Prof Art Hansen, Prof Sidney Waldron, Prof Claude Meillasoux, Prof Upendra Baxi, Prof B.B. Pande were among the distinguished academics who were signatories. From its inception, *Famine and Society*, attracted a multi-disciplinary group. It also enabled participation of famine and society in meetings held by other disciplines worldwide. 1988 saw a major conference being held in New Delhi with participants from Uganda, Ethiopia, the Phillipines, France, the United Kingdom (Proceedings, *Famine and Society* 1991 eds Jean Floud and Amrita Rangasami). It attracted the attention from UNESCO which provided the funding for the Bibliography of the documentation as well as the conference in 1996 held in New Delhi.

Among the participants at the New Delhi ad hoc Group meeting at the World Congress of Sociology in 1986 were Prof Quarentelli and Prof Dynes from the Disaster Studies Centre University of Delaware. The subsequent collaboration between the two groups led to a joint meeting at the ISA World Congress in 1998. What both groups agreed upon was to keep the distinctions between famine and disaster studies, distinctions that academics and policy makers in governments across the globe tended to overlook.

The initiation of a course of studies titled 'Famine and Society' in 1988-1989 at the University of Oxford and 'poverty and society' at the Frei University of Berlin also brought new members amongst them Ricarda Buch who set up an international web site and Prof Parto Teherani Kronner of Humboldt University and Prof. Thomas Riis University of Kiel. '*Famine and Society*' has an active group at Oxford who organized a meeting in 2003.

Ph.d studies

Academic research on famine undertaken by students their Ph.d in Delhi included David Hall Mathews (History) Oxford University and Arima Mishra (Sociology) University of Delhi. A number of visiting fellows included Christine Kinnealy UK, Anna Lou De Havenon from the USA.

Major events

1990 Famine and Society participated at the World Congress in Madrid

1992 A major conference was organized in New Delhi with collaboration with the University of Oxford and participants from France Prof Claude Meillasoux Prof Sidney Waldron USA and others.

1994 The Congress at Bielefeld had a number of participants. Oxford university supported a student group David Keen and David Hall Mathews amongst them who had been associated with Amrita Rangasami, Prof. Elwert from Frei University, Prof. Waldron from the State University of New York from Cortland and many others.

1996 Also a major inter congress meeting in Delhi with participants from Mexico, Brazil, the UK Germany USA and others.

The change from ad hoc to Working Group was only to be expected. Although the membership was far above the twenty five requisite for Research Committee status, this has yet to come about. *Famine and Society*'s becoming a Research committee is overdue.

Current aims of WG-05

The current aims of the WG-05 are as follows:

1. To foster collaboration and dialogue among colleagues across national boundaries.
2. To hold 2 Inter-Congress Meetings between the World Conferences.
3. To publish an annual research publication, a quarterly newsletter and a brochure.
4. To examine the possibility of developing a joint research project between India and South Africa.

Members of the Board

The following board members were selected at the XVI World Congress of Sociology held from 23 to 27 July 2006 in Durban, South Africa:

1. President: Dr. H.S. Anand, Member Secretary, NCR Planning Board, India (hs.anand@yahoo.com)
2. Senior Vice President: Prof. Wielislava Warzywode-Kruszynska, University of Lodz, Poland (profito@uni.lodz.pl)
3. Vice President: Prof. Habibul Khondker, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi (khondker@gmail.com)
4. General Secretary & Co-ordinator for Africa: Shaheeda Essack, Dept. of Education, Govt. of South Africa (essack.s@doe.gov.za)
5. Academic Adviser: Dr. Amrita Rangasami, Director, Centre for the Study of Administration of Relief, India (famsoc@giadl01.vsnl.net.in)
6. Member & Co-ordinator for Latin America: Lissette Aliaga Linares (lissette@prc.utexas.edu)
7. Member: Prof. Lynda Walters, University of Georgia, USA (ewalters@fcc.uga.edu)

Decisions taken during the XVI World Congress of Sociology held from 23 to 27 July 2006

At the Meeting of the Board of Working Group held on 26th July, 2006, the following decisions were taken:

1. It was decided that two Inter-Congress Meetings should be held in the period 2006-2010: one in Poland and one in India.
2. It was decided to bring out an annual research publication.
3. It was decided that whereas the name of the Working Group should be continued as *Famine & Society*, the Working Group should focus on various sociological processes of exclusion leading to marginalization or famine.
4. It was decided that while identifying the processes of exclusion the acronym "FAMINE" can be used to imply the following:
 - Famine represents a process whereby certain sections/ groups in society suffer from extreme forms of food insecurity resulting in serious physical distress sometimes leading to incapacity to work or death.
 - Alienation represents a process whereby certain sections/ groups feel ostracized from the mainstream society and even harbour hostility towards it.
 - Marginalization represents a process whereby the endowments and entitlements of certain sections / groups in society become severely curtailed adversely affecting their purchasing power.

- Inequity represents a process whereby certain sections/ groups suffer from lack of access to institutional support as compared to other sections / groups in society.
 - Neglect represents a process whereby certain sections/ groups in society suffer from lack of appropriate opportunities for their socio-economic development.
 - Exclusion refers to a process whereby certain sections/ groups in society feel excluded from the benefits of both social security and economic development available to other sections/ groups enjoying a higher status in society.
5. It was decided to bring out a Brochure outlining the critical aims and objectives of the Working Group.
 6. It was decided to bring out a quarterly Newsletter.
 7. It was decided to examine the possibility of developing a joint research project between India and South Africa.
 8. It was decided that Dr. Amrita Rangasami will write a brief Note on the History of the formation of "Famine & Society."
 9. It was decided to request all members of Famine & Society who have not paid their ISA Membership to immediately do so. In this regard, the President was asked to procure a list of such members from the ISA Secretariat.
 10. It was also decided to enlist new members to the Working Group keeping in view their academic background and commitment to deprived sections of society.

Mid-term conferences

The first mid-term conference has been planned for 5-7 June 2008 at the University of Lodz in Poland. The theme of the conference is Poverty and Marginalization in a Globalized World. Submissions were due by 15 February 2008. For more information contact Magdalena Rek, Secretary of the Conference, Department of General Sociology, University of Lodz, Poland. The email address is: poverty.conference@gmail.com.

Members of WG-05

The following is a list of the 18 members of WG-05.

Harjit Singh Anand; Rachel Bezner Kerr; Shaheeda Essack; Oluyemi Fayomi; Gloria Gonzalez; Tatiana Karabchuk; Habibul H. Khondker; Diana Luzzatto; S. Bernard Manyena; Kamlesh Mohan; Dimitra Pavlakou; Muhammad Saeed Ali; Fei Wang; Wielislawa warzywoda-Kruszynska; Shettima Abba Gana; Veronica Ofelia Villarespe Reyes; Patricie Mukahirwa; Lydia Ameh.

Future activities

WG-05 will also be embarking on the following activities and looks forward to your participation:

1. WG-05 wishes to assemble a research interest directory that could be sent to journal editors looking for individuals to review books or manuscripts. If you are interested in being listed in this research interest directory please send me your contact information, including ***your name, affiliation and address, e-mail address, and a very brief statement of your areas of research and scholarship.*** Please send to Essack.S@doe.gov.za and note that it is for the **WG-05 Research Interest Directory**.

2. WG-05 is aware that colleagues are engaged in research and wishes to encourage collaboration, especially across national boundaries. The newsletter provides opportunities for the membership to disseminate information with a view to promoting collaboration. Should you be interested in submitting information on your research, please submit 100-150 word synopses of on-going or planned research indicating if and how you would like members to participate. Submit a description of your project to the editor for inclusion in future issues of the *Newsletter* to Shaheeda Essack, Secretary, WG-05 at Essack.S@doe.gov.za.

Shaheeda Essack - General Secretary & Co-ordinator for Africa