Reducing poverty as a multi-dimensional reality involves issues of livelihood, access to resources, decent work, the building of developmental capacities and institutions to build and sustain an effective democratic polity. This conference attempts to look at the roles of food, work, livelihood and cash in dealing with poverty.

Food security is an embodied expression of social and economic relations and represents issues of equity, justice and freedom. The distribution of the products of work results in social structures, where access to food becomes difficult for those on the margins of the political economy. In many developing countries, there exists a network for the distribution of food grains at subsidised rates. The impact of this form of public distribution needs to be assessed. Most of these systems are quite wasteful and provide often only low quality food to the poor. How can they be improved? Is it possible for organised groups of consumers to monitor both the quality and distribution of food grains? Or could cash be an important alternative intervention in asserting the rights of the marginalized and increasing their access to food and other issues of material freedom? Given that the major constraints put forward as an argument for the retreat of the welfare state are financial resources, how can progressive politics and trade union action generate and defend the fiscal space for direct financial interventions?

Another important issue relating to poverty alleviation is access to institutional finances. The small agricultural producers and the urban self-employed are to a large extent excluded from loans from financial institutions. Denied of this opportunity, these people depend on private sources of finance such as money lenders or commercial micro-credit institutions who charge exorbitant rates of interest which most of them find difficult to return. They are thus indebted for
life resulting in bondage and forced labour. It is therefore necessary to explore how the financial institutions can deliver credit at reasonable rates to the working poor.

Finally, while dealing with poverty and food, one cannot overlook the basic social and environmental conditions of food production. The role of agriculture in developing countries has high significance as the primary source of income for many poor people and as provider of sustainable food security for the population at large. This conference will assess the existing agricultural practices and innovations, and examine the impact these have on the lives of the working poor. New types of agricultural practices can be found and these need not relate solely to larger landholdings requiring high inputs. The steady increase in urbanisation in developing countries and the swift growth of the existing urban centres raise the question of proper food supply. Agriculture in peri-urban areas is a very important aspect that needs to be researched thoroughly. These issues need to be looked at from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

The ICDD conference papers address the following issues:

- Agricultural practices that increase the availability of food for poor people, e.g. production for domestic use; land reform, reduction of post-harvest losses; strengthening peri-urban agriculture; sustainable productivity increase, etc.

- Policies for better access to food, e.g. empowerment of beneficiaries, shorter supply chains; better government food distribution schemes; cash transfers; food stamps; etc.

- Policies for affordable financial services for the poor, e.g. public banks, cooperative banks, or special subsidies for private banks; new digital technologies to reach the rural poor; etc.

- Decent Work policies for informal workers, e.g. better working conditions for rural workers, self-organization of informal workers, universal social security; public works and employment guarantee schemes, policies and processes of formalization, etc.