Editorial

This issue of the Journal marks the beginning of the fourth year of its publication. This initial period has been a worthwhile and interesting experience, which has shown that a Journal which originates in, and is controlled and distributed from, an African country can be produced regularly and maintain the interest of both practitioners and academics in a variety of fields. Much of the credit for the successful launching of the Journal must go to the founding Editor, Joe Hampson, the existing Editorial Board, and the funding organisation, who are all to be thanked and congratulated.

This fourth year of publication of the Journal also brings a new Editor, as Joe Hampson has had to take a new post which will not allow him to devote to the Journal the time required to be Editor. He will, however, continue as member of the Editorial Board.

A change of Editor seems an opportune time to reflect on the place and aims of the Journal. In its first few years the Journal set out to publish critical analyses of social development issues as they affect the poor and marginalised in society, and to deal with concerns particularly relevant in Southern Africa and the so-called Third-World. In doing this the Journal was also attempting to build a body of local material which originated in and serves this area, and which would be able to inform teaching theory and practice in social development and related fields. These general aims for the Journal remain valid, and the next three year period will continue within these terms of reference, particularly encouraging African and Third World scholars and practitioners to contribute to the debates surrounding issues of development, participation, information and so on, which are so critical for us in the Third World.

In the next three year period it is hoped that a number of associated publications will be produced by the Journal, including an Occasional Paper series, a Social Work Fieldwork Manual, and a number of workshop reports. In addition, the Journal hopes to host, or co-host, a number of local and regional workshops relating to various social development issues.

In this issue of the Journal there are a number of themes that unite in some way the various articles that are included in it. Among these themes are the issues of change in social organisations; the breakdown, with increasing modernisation and urbanisation, of traditional support structures; the lack of a clear understanding of this breakdown by the state machinery which could move in to fill the gap; and special interest groups.

In Rwezaura's challenging article "Changing Community Obligations to the Elderly in Contemporary Africa" he looks at changes in traditional support structures and associated positions of power for the elderly. His analysis of the way in which the elderly are trying to retain their power and prestige in a changing world leads him to call for an urgent review of the institutional structures that deal with the elderly, and official recognition of the increasing ineffectiveness of traditional support structures. Swift, in her article "Support for the Dying and Bereaved in Zimbabwe: Traditional and New Approaches", takes a similar look at approaches to the dying and bereaved. She argues that some new approaches to dealing with these issues can be seen as converging with traditional support systems, and that a recognition of the value of cross-fertilisation between these approaches could inform new and relevant ways to provide support for the dying and bereaved.

Lergo argues, in "Patterns of Psychiatric Illness. A Study in Kaduna Psychiatric Facilities", that the growing complexity of society, and the growing contradictions between the traditional stated value system and the actual practices needed to succeed in modern Nigeria, have increased the stresses and pressures placed on ordinary people. These stress factors are developing without the concurrent development of new 'modern' support structures to replace the traditional support and protective networks. As a result a certain population group (young, married, male, city dweller, self-employed, with little or no formal education) can be identified which seems to be particularly vulnerable to psychiatric illness.

In "Mental Health: Perspectives of Resolving Social Stigma in Employment for Ex-Mental Patients", Osei-Hwedie argues that the state must play its part in initiating changes in attitudes to the mentally ill, including the drawing up of a Bill of Rights for the mentally ill, which would help to surmount prejudice and discrimination against this group of people. Mwansa takes up the question of political will in relation to the distribution (or more accurately mal-distribution) of health services. Mwansa's article, "Rural-Urban Health Care Service Imbalances in Zambia: Forces and Outcomes", defines political will as a major issue in making decisions for change. A particular area of change includes changes in the rural-urban distribution of services, which would counteract historical imbalances which appear to be being perpetuated in post-colonial independent states.