

Editorial

Development and the African crisis

The Chinese ideogram for 'crisis' is a combination of two pictures, one for 'opportunity', the other for 'disaster'. In the last few years it has been certainly true that the crisis in Africa has in reality been a disaster. Drought and famine have ravaged the continent for three years from 1981/82, with untold numbers of deaths and even greater numbers suffering drought-induced disease and malnutrition. Yet it is worth recalling that such drought has been selective both in the type of person affected (no politician or bank official has yet been found starving) and in the places affected (cities and towns of drought-affected countries have not suffered food shortages). And, severe though it is, the drought must not shield our eyes from examining all the causes of famine in Africa, for the selectivity of its effects suggests that lack of rainfall cannot be the only reason.

The recent UN Special Session on Africa, emphasised once again other elements in the African crisis: the vast debt burden, representing 58 percent of Africa's GNP, some US\$340 for every person on the continent, and nineteen times the amount Africa receives in aid each year; the reliance on primary commodity exports to finance increasingly costly manufactured goods; economies inherited from colonialism which concentrate exports upon a narrow range of primary commodities (for which prices are stagnant or dropping) to finance the import of increasingly costly manufactured goods, usually imported from a very small number of countries; the population problem creating high urbanisation rates, and tremendous demands on social infrastructure and services; and finally Africa's dependency on food aid (which ironically may have held down food prices and allowed governments to de-emphasise food production).

Of course generalisations about a continent hide great variations, just as aggregated data of a country hide regional differences. The famine situation has stabilised, but six countries – Ethiopia, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Botswana and Cape Verde – are in dire straits and require emergency food aid, while a few countries such as Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe have surplus for export. It is important to see how the African crisis can also contain the seeds of opportunity in even the most disastrous situation. We must, as well as reacting to emergency, do all in our power to work towards

long term solutions that will release the poor from the devastating effects of climate, famine and underdevelopment that many now experience. In responding to emergency crises, we must also think of appropriate long term strategies by reinforcing countries' capacities to deal with drought and famine through infrastructure, transport and food reserves, through appropriate training and through the resettlement of those displaced.

The theme of development in Africa as a crisis with elements of both disaster and opportunity are reflected in our selection of articles for this issue. The first article by Burki presents some of the results of famine analysis, reminding us not only of the disproportionate effects of such disasters upon the poor, but identifying policy prescriptions that may help agencies move from a framework of offering treatment to victims to that of working with partners in development.

The article by Mallya, "Successes and Failures of Rural Social Development", underlines the critical importance agriculture plays in African development, and also offers policy prescriptions, based on Tanzania's rather unhappy experience, for effective development of agriculture. Unfortunately for the needs of conceptual clarity, however, the rural agricultural sector of any country cannot easily be separated from urban sectors and from issues of urbanisation, unemployment and population. The article by Siamwiza, "Consequences of Rural Poverty in Relation to Urban Squatter Problems in Lusaka", relates development in Zambia to one marginalised group, urban squatters, and argues that interventions to alter the condition of urban poor have also exacerbated the deteriorating lifestyle of rural dwellers. The informal sector is often portrayed as a nostrum for the solution of urban poverty, but Brand's paper, "One Dollar Workplaces", in presenting the results of a Zimbabwean study of the so-called 'informal-sector', shows that the situation is much more complex. While using the concept, she concludes that the phenomenon is more heterogeneous than usually believed, and that policy must be framed within the whole socio-economic system if the root causes of poverty in 'one-dollar workplaces' are to be removed.

Income-generation, a theme touched by Brand and Siamwiza, is dwelt on at some length by Else *et al* in their paper "Economic Development in the African Context". They argue that the practice of social development often underrates the importance of income-generation within projects, and even when given central importance projects end up at best not being able to offer the level of income expected by the participants, and at worst **costing** the participants rather than being a source of income. Although economic development is not identical to social development, nevertheless, the authors remind us, it is a prerequisite.

Oakley continues the debate on indicators of development initiated in our inaugural issue. In this "Evaluating Social Development: 'How much' or 'How Good'?", Oakley builds on the economic base to stress the importance of additional and administrative concerns, and presents a list of five indicators by which social development projects could be monitored and evaluated.