

Editorial

This issue of the *Journal* contains a variety of articles, seemingly dissimilar, but with an over-arching theme of building on indigenous organisation and strengthening communities. Vakil addresses the question of how housing cooperatives might contribute to women's shelter and development by presenting some of the results of a study of five urban housing cooperatives in Harare and Bulawayo. She notes that these cooperatives, while useful and potentially able to improve women's access to shelter, need strengthening through the identification and motivation of female leaders. Gender-sensitive promotion of housing cooperatives is necessary as women are more likely to join community-based rather than workplace-based housing cooperatives. Vakil argues that a strengthening of the housing co-operative movement would have a positive impact, not only on women and their families, but on other disadvantaged groups who tend to "fall through the cracks" of the existing housing provision system.

Kishindo continues the theme of building on community capacity by examining Malawi's Functional Literacy Programme. This is a community-based initiative, assisted by the Ministry of Community Services, which aims to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of adults who did not manage to learn these skills within the formal school system. Kishindo notes that, despite the obvious advantages to the programme, in particular the fact that it is linked to development education, the programme suffers from a high rate of turnover of instructors, with additional lack of interest on the part of youths and men. Kishindo ends with some positive suggestions which, if implemented, could improve the programme's outreach.

In contrast to the concerns expressed by Kishindo regarding Malawi's literacy programme, Badu and Parker enthuse over the success of Ghana's Voluntary Workcamp Association. This local NGO has built on the tradition of self-help, supportive relationships and cooperative work, deeply ingrained in the culture of Ghanaian villages. The success of the VWAG relies partly on the fact that it does not initiate projects itself, but depends on local rural communities to identify these, while VWAG makes a voluntary contribution in the form of equipment, materials, food, money or labour. VWAG mobilises youth in these communities to engage in these self-help projects by participating in "Workcamps". The VWAG has made it possible for rural communities to utilise minimum financial resources and through self-help, to improve their standard of living.

The strong theme of participation exemplified by Badu and Parker is echoed by Ntebe who passionately argues for a change in the traditional residual mode of social work intervention, instead calling for an alternative radical approach. Ntebe summarises some of the key proposals which have emerged from a series of social

work conferences in South Africa in recent years. These strongly critiqued the racist and undemocratic dispensation at that time and advocated a more committed and involved role for social workers in the post-apartheid society. The article is refreshingly direct, emerging as it does from the struggles of the social work profession in that country.

The article by Dr Daniel S Sanders (a former Editorial Advisor to this Journal, and previously well-known for his contributions in the area of peace and social development), provided to the Journal posthumously by his wife Cristobel, is a seminal contribution on the role that universities can and should play in a situation where violence and environmental crises are no longer confined to one nation. Sanders forcefully remind us that the world's arms race and excessive military spending are serious impediments to development, and significant factors in the global economic crisis. These, together with other structural inequalities in the world's economic system promote and sustain poverty and inequality and create a new form of violence and a threat to world peace. He advocates a new social vision where considerations of human value and quality of life for all are assured through the establishment of an equitable international order. This provides the larger macro perspective, where *"...commitment to sustainable development, social justice and participation of people in shaping their own destiny and peace"* is seen as vital to the success of the community enterprise of social development.

Shaw and Al-Awwad examine the importance of cultural and epistemological contexts in shaping the character of social research in the Arab world. The article presents the argument that Western academic social scientists have frequently failed to take into account local definitions of meaning, and, in the context of this article, the texture of Muslim culture, with its implications for the role of the individual and social relations. The authors consider how more appropriate ways of building an indigenous social science research committed to work of critical quality can be achieved.

Jackson examines the extent to which the AIDS epidemic is rapidly becoming a critical issue for development in Africa in a variety of sectors, including health, welfare, education and training, employment and agriculture. The article provides a sobering realisation that development, however conceptualised, is threatened by an epidemic of staggering proportions: for example Jackson quotes the World Health Organisation which has estimated that there will be up to ten million maternal orphans from AIDS by the year 2,000, of whom 90% will be in sub-Saharan Africa. The socioeconomic effects of AIDS will have a profound effect on the economies of countries in this region and Jackson urges a concerted multisectoral response to the epidemic, both to slow down its spread, and to assist those affected and infected.