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Editorial

There are several themes in this issue of the Journal. The article by Møller *et al* considers the positive contribution that informal clubs have played in South Africa in dealing with the problem of youth alienation. This comprehensive article traces the development of these clubs over a five year period. Youth clubs played a significant role during the *apartheid* era when they were one of the only means by which youth could find a positive experience in the face of severe disruptions in their education and lack of opportunities in the job market. This role continues into the present where the opportunities for developing personal skills and relationships is one of the most attractive features of youth clubs. The article notes that positive peer education, group cohesiveness, mutual respect and a common sense of purpose may have strengthened democratic values of social tolerance and respect – worthwhile values in the newly democratic South Africa.

The second article by Osei-Hwedie continues a discussion of the serious problem of AIDS, addressed in previous issues of the Journal. The author provides an African perspective in viewing some of the psychosocial issues involved, although he notes that many of the issues are similar to those experienced elsewhere, such as actual or feared rejection by family and friends and an overwhelming experience of stress and depression following the diagnosis. The article also explores some of the socioeconomic consequences of AIDS, considers relevant ethical issues and the need for special education and community programmes to counter the disease. The serious nature of the pandemic within Africa and its rapid spread within Africa makes AIDS one of the most significant counters to development on the continent and is of special concern to this Journal. Any further contributions on this topic are welcomed.

Anyanwu's article links the themes of education, gender and access to finance. The author considers the disadvantaged position of women in Nigerian society, aggravated by the difficulty they experience in gaining access to bank credit, a crucial disadvantage due to the consequences involved – the inability to develop and improve their socioeconomic status. The author develops the argument that this disadvantage is brought about through lack of opportunity in the educational sphere – which leads to poor literacy levels and a lack of awareness generally of the benefits of such facilities. Certain key recommendations are made which are intended to improve women's participation in the national economy and bring about a more equitable dispensation.

Kishindo examines the need for family planning within Malawi; for example he notes that some of the consequences of rapid population growth are high unem-

ployment, overcrowding in schools and hospitals, the development of squatter settlements and an increasing shortage of arable land. Although the child spacing programme in Malawi has concentrated on women as its target group, Kishindo points out that this will not achieve the desired success unless men are also involved: the family planning messages need to appeal to the male's culturally defined role as family head, provider and decision-maker in order to persuade him that contraception and the smaller family are worthwhile objectives in improving the quality of life.

Anderson *et al* examine the need for a model of social work utilising what they term "human focused" or social development concepts. This requires reconceptualisation of social work education and practice that will enable practitioners to deal with the many and varied crises within Africa – some of which are explored in this issue: AIDS, breakdown of the extended family structure and increasing poverty. A human focused development philosophy would include as its goals an improvement in the quality of life through a variety of strategies. Principally these encompass an awareness of the strengths and abilities of people; in this context the authors delineate an empowerment model for practice. This model proposes the notion of assisting individuals to identify their concerns within a 'shared' political and social context, rather than these remaining as isolated individual problems. The authors advocate the development of competencies, skills and resources to assist the 'client system' in overcoming oppressive situations.

Maforah explores the link between poverty and health in the rapidly urbanising cities of the developing world, with an emphasis on the South African situation. The author notes that due to the harsh reality of the urban environment, the weakening of traditional family structures has led to an increase in the numbers of female-headed households. Maforah is particularly concerned about the effect that poverty has on women's health, including lack of control over reproduction and general malnutrition. She points out that mass poverty is the single most powerful inhibitor of social and economic development which requires a political approach at the highest government levels in order to redress. The paper ends on a note of hope, outlining the new Reconstruction and Development Programme with which the ANC government aims to improve living conditions through improved health care and social services.