

## **Book Reviews**

**South Africa: Wealth, Poverty and Reconstruction**, edited by Lual A Deng & Elling N Tjonneland, Chr Michelsen Institute in cooperation with the Centre for South African Studies, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 1996, ISBN: 82-90584-20-2 (p/b) 207pp, Price N/K.

This book attempts to do one thing that previous research in this field may not have seriously attempted to do and that is: present a picture of poverty among all the peoples of South Africa, including the blacks. It is comprised of seven papers written by a group of South African and non-South African researchers. In general, papers present an overview and analysis of poverty in South Africa and the efforts to alleviate and reduce poverty through the reconstruction and development programme. It also offers lessons and experiences from poverty reduction and poverty-oriented aid in sub-Saharan Africa.

The overview paper by Elling N Tjonneland discusses study projects undertaken by the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town's School of Economics; The Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development; and Household Survey. These projects and surveys present a comprehensive statistical analysis of poverty in South Africa. The author brings up very important facts that: about a third of all households, or half the population, can be classified as poor, and that the poor are overwhelmingly African, living in rural areas, are women and others living in female-headed households. The article further points out that the gap between the rich and the poor has been growing; the disparity between the racial groups is still large; and that the foreign migrants are an unknown factor in the poverty profile of the country. On the reduction of poverty, the article identifies the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as the main instrument of the (Government of National Unity (GNU). It lists achievements such as the school feeding programme which provides free mid-days meals for more than 6 million children; free health care for pregnant women and infants; affordable water supply schemes; affordable homes for up to 300,000 families in rural areas; and affordable electricity supply for many families in the urban area. It does, however, point out that the RDP programme has not done enough to alleviate poverty among the majority of the people, and concludes that the success of poverty alleviation programmes will depend upon a well-performing economy; and job creation and income-generating opportunities.

Revisiting the surveys mentioned in the overview paper by Elling N Tjonneland, Pundy Pillay's paper analyses the poverty situation in South Africa by using statistical data and graphical representations. Pillay uses six poverty indicators of:

*Expenditure levels; Education; Access to services; Access to and use of rural land; Labour market activity and inactivity; and Income distribution*, to demonstrate the pattern of poverty along the lines of location of residence, province; race; household structure; gender and age; and employment and income.

Peter le Roux dwells substantially on the RDP and its capability to deal with poverty alleviation. The paper starts by pointing out that the RDP White Paper should have set alleviation of poverty as an unambiguous priority, which it did not. Although uprooting of poverty is said to be first priority of the RDP, it is clearly not the only goal. There are other related priorities such as: *delivery of the social and physical infrastructural development; the restructuring of the economy; and the development of human resources across the board*. These are sometimes regarded as benefitting more the relatively better-off groups and classes than alleviating poverty among the very poor. No wonder the RDP base document has been criticised by some experts for not being an integrated plan of action, but rather a pre-election shopping list of goals the ANC had hoped to attain once it took over government. The paper further discusses the RDP policies to deal with poverty under the subheadings of: *Employment generating growth; Provision of Basic Needs; Social old age pensions; and Mother and child maintenance grants*. The last section of the article discusses the RDP delivery and anti-poverty programme, and sets out the following strategies: *Affirmative action in favour of the poor; Restructuring of the poor; Establishing appropriate delivery institutions; Spending the RDP funds wisely; and the Existence of a sustainable economic growth and development*.

Bill Davies looks at poverty disparities in the Eastern Cape Province. The chapter considers four aspects of the situation, namely: overall provincial context in terms of population distribution; discrepancies between the province and the country as a whole; some indicators of internal disparities within the province; and finally reference is made to some specific poverty-alleviation measures in the province. It is a well-presented chapter with statistical information from various studies being extensively used.

The next chapter in the book is about illegal immigrants in South Africa. The objective of the chapter is three-fold: to describe the condition under which illegal immigrants live, and what is being done to alleviate their lot; to expose the interface/linkage between their presence in the country and the poverty of native South Africans; and to propose strategies to alleviate their problem. The chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the issues in historical perspective in southern Africa. Various approaches have been put forward to manage mass migrations; and the chapter concludes with some policy recommendations.

The last two chapters discuss poverty in relation to sub-Saharan Africa. The first of the two discusses *poverty-oriented aid* and the second discusses *poverty*

*reduction: lessons from sub-Saharan Africa.* Both papers have elaborate discussions on Structural Adjustment Programmes and how these have turned out to be "poverty-generating" rather than "poverty alleviating."

This collection of papers is a very important study in the subject of poverty and poverty alleviation in South Africa specifically, and in the southern Africa region in general. The issues discussed have been well-handled and it will add a worth of background information to future studies on the subject. However, its handling of the RDP as the main strategy for the alleviation of poverty in South Africa has rendered the whole work rather short-sighted. Poverty is a long-standing problem in southern Africa, and it is high time studies of combating it came with long-term and sustainable strategies which will not only be seen to alleviate poverty, but also lessen tremendously the dependence of the poor countries on donor agencies.

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Panos Media Briefing No 16 (October 1995) **The Internet and the South: Super-highway or Dirt-track?**, Panos Institute, 9 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD, UK, Fax: 071-278-0345, email: panoslondon@gn.apc.org

In September last year I was privileged to be able to "listen in" on one of the earliest "global network academies" – a Virtual Seminar in Global Political Economy. The GPE as it is known, was initiated by a Canadian professor now resident in the United States, and linked students and staff in universities in those two countries as well as such widely dispersed locations as Britain, Mexico, Brazil, Japan – and Zimbabwe. The second GPE dealt with *Global Cities and Social Movements: an exploration of theories and cases*, presumably looking toward this year's Habitat II Conference. Through the Internet participants were able to acquire readings, organise tutorial groups and also enter into a wider debate with the whole GPE seminar.

Web Review (October 13-26, 1995) Special Issue on the Digital Academy, called this Virtual Seminar the "*most ambitious of these experiments... and the most significant in the long term....the first step towards a university without walls.*"

Two months later I had to unsubscribe.

Why withdraw from such a truly ground-breaking experiment? Firstly, I was unable to subscribe to the full seminar, as my institution cannot afford to pay the fees for access to the Internet (we use the "NGO" Email system, ESANET) (1).

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(1) For a description of this system, see SARDC's review of this Panos Briefing dated 9 April 1996.