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.

Reviewed by Bright Nkhata, SAPES Trust, P O Box MP111, Mount Pleasant, Harare.

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.

I therefore missed much of the debate and the detail of the lessons, and almost all of the readings: these were only accessible from a Web site. Our accounts department was also beginning to complain about the sudden rise in our Email bills: supposedly only the cost of a local telephone call, the messages received from the GPE cost significantly more. And then there were what I might term "cultural" factors. Staff at our college did not participate, despite the fact that one of the subjects taught here is urbanisation. This I attribute to resistance to the technology. Another "cultural" factor was that the actual content of that part of the wider debate which I was able to access (though not the lectures themselves) was very "Northern" biased, and "personal."

Last week I received a letter from the IDRC (an organisation that is much concerned with information) informing me that one of its publications will henceforward only be available on the World Wide Web. I have been denied access to a useful source of information because I do not have the technology.

On the other hand, through the limited "conferences" available to me through Email I have been informed of various issues before they emerge in the media, and of others – particularly human rights issues – which are never mentioned in the more "official" news channels. One recent example of this is the issue of the young woman from Togo who had sought refuge in the United States in order to avoid undergoing genital mutilation. Pressure groups used Email to circulate the address to write to for letters and faxes protesting her extradition, and she was finally granted asylum. Another example of the "liberating" force of the Internet is the concern demonstrated through this medium over the Chiapas uprising in Mexico.

It would seem that the Internet will not empower on a regional level. South Africa currently rates No 16 in terms of worldwide registered Internet hosts. In southern Africa, like the transport routes, so do the Email routes all have to pass through South Africa. The old structures are not dismantled by the new technologies.

The above are illustrations of some of the points raised in the Panos Briefing, which reinforced and helped focus my somewhat subjective "non" experience with the Internet from the point of view of users from the South.

The Briefing, one of a series *"designed to foster informed debate on issues of environment and development"* is not so much a paper or an argument, but a list of points, a sort of *"did you know?"* about the Internet. It does not set out to prove that the Internet is either a superhighway or a dirt track, but to provide information.

It gives a brief history of the Internet, first conceived of by the Rand Corporation – a right-wing US think tank and no friend of humankind. It explains in simple terms the how and why (why has it spread so fast?), and it gives some very quotable quotes, such as Thabo Mbeki's *"half of humanity has never made a telephone call."* Mention is made of all the most salient issues, including AT & T's plan to

"surround" Africa with fibre-optic cable – an issue which has given rise to a great deal of debate: the "pro" (not mentioned in this Briefing) being that this would give Africa access to telephones and significantly decrease that proportion of humanity which has never made a call. One thing which is not quite made clear in the Briefing is the difference between the Net (or the Web) and Email: throughout the report Email is sometimes mentioned, sometimes the Internet, without adequately distinguishing between the two, even at the end of the Briefing under *"your Internet guide."* Even SARDC in its own review of the Briefing does not clarify this distinction for the lay person.

Ultimately it will be the policy-makers' will or resistance to technology which will make it more widely available. The Internet is there, it has only to be made accessible. Governments can facilitate the spread of information, as in Zimbabwe's AIDS education campaign, or it can obstruct, as in the issue of cellular phones. Part of the problem is the phenomenon widely observed in Africa of the higher echelons of management, those who make the policy decisions, being the least familiar with the technology – often to the extent of being resistant to it. If development is conditional on transforming the economy to a "knowledge-based" one, as in the OECD countries, then such factors will hold Africa back, and the Internet will be no Superhighway but will remain a plaything of the elite academic class.

Reviewed by Anne Derges, School of Social Work, P Bag 66022, Kopje, Harare.

In Search of Hope for Zimbabwe's Farm Workers, Dede Esi Amanor-Wilks & Contributors, Dateline Southern Africa and Panos, London 1995, 70 pp.

"Management only bothers with us when they want something done or when we make noise over something. They do not care less how we survive."

Amanor-Wilks and contributors chronicle the lives of farm workers living and working on Zimbabwe's mostly white-owned commercial farms and the unacceptable conditions they continue to endure. The writers' honest pens outline the dismal lives of about 1.8 million commercial farm workers and their children who provide cheap labour to 4,500 white commercial farmers who own and control 12 million hectares or 70% of Zimbabwe's land.

The book relates the hardships farm labourers experienced during the era of colonial rule, moves through their hopes and aspirations for a better life in the liberation struggle and independence phase until the present time. Nine main chapters of text broken with boxes of oral testimony which give voice to farm workers, present research based on past and current legal provisions, the political situation and historical background to show how farm labourers experience life.