Editorial

Realising relevance

Often the pursuit of relevance in develoment is taken as so obviously a Good as to be beyond rational analysis and criticism. Activities undertaken or agreements proposed under the rubic of a quest for authentic and indigenous development can often, for that very reason, become immune to challenge, and both theory and practice of a shallow nature become elevated to central tenets and revolutionary acts when the word 'relevant' is involved. Such an unfortunate state of affairs, then, is not to be blamed on the proponents of any doctrine of 'relevance', but it is surely time for analysis to go beyond the mere commendatory to more strictly logical forms of interpretation of reality. This issue of the Journal looks at the idea of 'relevance' within social development, and in five of the articles focuses on one or two perspectives on relevance, one concerned with conceptualisation and theory, the other concerned with practice issues.

The article by Ankrah, "Radicalising Roles for Africa's Development: Some Evolving Practice Issues", and that of Jones, 'Educating for Uncertainty", have surprising congruence considering that they are reflecting an experience from two different continents. Their congruence lies in post-colonial attempts to radicalise, or get to the root of, issues in social development - in Ankrah's case by proposing a shift in paradigm from modernisation to a "radicalising approach" for practitioners in social development and social welfare, and in Jones' case study, by moving from foreign conceptualisations in social work education to those derived from local culture and local experience. Ankrah's case is argued necessarily at a fairly high level of abstraction, while the implications of Jones' case study seem to point to some pessimism about the possibility of genuinely 'indigenous' models, theories and frameworks evolving successfully. In any case Ankrah's criticism of the status quo, and of the present orientation of social development and social work professionals in Africa, suggests that both authors realise that radicalising roles or concepts remain Herculean tasks.

Relevance in the domain of practice is analysed in the articles by Grainger, "The Literacy Campaign in Zimbabwe", Jongah "Use of Acquired Literacy Skills", and Kasambira "Youth Skills Training as a Strategy for Rural Employment in Zimbabwe". Each is concerned to discover the extent to which and how particular types of social development intervention make for a

close fit with the needs and the cultural aspirations of the target groups. Grainger examines the literacy programme in Zimbabwe, and concludes that a greater expression of political will is necessary for the programme to be successful. It is not surprising, perhaps, that for the few social development workers in Zimbabwe that are involved in this field, there has been more attention paid to the technocratic elements of illiteracy than the dimension mentioned by Ankrah, that of political will. The second study on literacy argues for a strong connection between involvement in income-generating projects and success in literacy classes. Jongah makes a case for sensitising agencies and personnel, in both literacy work and in general development work, to the need for the two to be integrated for successful social develoment. The study of Kasambira on two youth skills training centres draws attention to the dramatic problem, throughout Africa, of youth unemployment and the particular appropriateness of the training curricula offered by the two centres. Kasambira is moderately optimistic about the radicalising potential of such centres, but nevertheless remains aware that the problem, because it is derived from fundamental structural causes, is only partially amenable to change by such means.