

The Political Economy of Information on Development, Democracy & Security in Southern Africa, Maurice Lundu (ed), SAPES Books, Harare, 1996, ISBN: 1-77905-43-7, 179 pp, inc index (p/b). Price N/K.

The Political Economy of Information on Development, Democracy & Security in Southern Africa is a welcome piece of work both in terms of informing the public about the crucial role of information in a democratic society, and as a basis for further research in the area. It is quite a unique book in the sense that it attempts to investigate the issue from various perspectives. This kind of work required experts in various fields; as such it not only presents the views and observations of the 'Traditional Information Workers,' but also those of professional experts.

In the first chapter Abate presents the conceptual framework of the problem. He starts by giving an overview of what he calls the three most important challenges facing the Southern African region, namely: development, democracy and governance, and security. Next, he looks at what he refers to as the "*information problematique*" and identifies various subdivisions, such as: definition of information; ideological dimensions; institutional-cum-infrastructure dimensions; the political economy of information in the context of underdevelopment; and the need for extensive research into the area. As a background to what needs to be done, it is fairly well presented. It should be pointed out, however, that with the attainment of majority rule in South Africa, some of the issues need to be examined in a new setting, hence the need for further research.

Zwizwai's study examines the process of information generation, dissemination and consumption related to the economic reform and structural adjustment programme in Zimbabwe. The study assesses the adequacy and quality of information generated by and disseminated to the various parties in society. It also examines the extent to which the government, through legislation, protects the information rights of society, both on paper and in practice; and the information infrastructure between the government and the donor community. Among its findings, the study established that the people were not informed enough about the merits and demerits of the structural adjustment programme. As is the case with many other government projects, the validity of these findings would not be doubted.

The next chapter is on information for manufacturing and foreign trade in Zimbabwe, and the study has four objectives, namely: identifying and discussing the information requirements and outputs of key players; analysing the requirements and outputs in order to determine the existence of obligations, choices and rights to information; considering the methods and mechanisms used to generate and disseminate information and discussing their shortcomings in the fulfilment of other key players' rights; and highlighting key problems on the flow of information

and recommending areas needing further examination. Chawira concludes that information does not reach its intended audiences and believes that there is a need for further research into how best the manufacturing and foreign trade sector can be provided with appropriate information.

Deve and Derges look at information for economic, social and cultural equity in Southern Africa and both contend that this equity does not exist. Deve, for example, argues that, these economic and social inequalities are based on racial lines, whereby the minority peoples of European descent are better-off than the majority of African descent. This is explained in terms of access to and control over information. The authors believe that to attain a reasonable degree of equity, peoples' strategic concerns, classified basically as access to clean water, decent food, health care and education, should be placed on the information agenda. Derges points out that the state seems not to see the importance of information in relation to the promotion of cultural equity. This is evidenced by the absence of well-articulated information policies; and the lack of adequate investment of resources to develop the information sector for the promotion of culture. She further states that SADC existed for fifteen years before the establishment of a culture and information sector.

Lundu and Likubangwa examine the concept of 'Information is Power' and how this affected the privatisation of the copper mining industry in Zambia. They start by presenting the history of the mining industry in Zambia; the change in policy direction at the beginning of the new political dispensation; and a general analysis of technical, economic and social issues. They then proceed to discuss the information scenario with regard to the copper mining industry; with a systematic presentation of the six parameters of the *information problematic* outlined in the research methodology. The findings of the study indicate that the government did not conform to all these six parameters in their handling of privatisation.

Mugwara discusses information for food security in Southern Africa and his findings show that there is inadequate information on water resources and needs, household food security and the use of indigenous knowledge. He recommends the establishment of a regional information system on food security. The chapter, however, does not touch much on the subject of information in the context of the *information problematic*.

In the conclusion, Lundu contends that policy-makers, political functionaries, business executives and leaders of academic and research institutions must endeavour to make use of information generated, produced and disseminated within the region; and he views this as the cardinal point upon which information across borders in the Southern African region beyond the year 2000 should be conceptualised and developed.

As mentioned in the introduction, the book has generally set the stage for further research in the field of the political economy of information and how it affects development, democracy and security in Southern Africa. One serious weakness, though, is the lack of consistency in the way the research was carried out as reflected in the way the results have been presented. In fact, the observation made in the preface that only two researchers pursued the investigation in a consistent and systematic manner is very correct. Some papers went so much away from the locus of the study that they ended up saying very little about the problem that they were set to address.

Of importance also are some errors that may have originated from either the editing process or the printing process – such as incorrect citations and titles for some articles. Otherwise this is a book worth reading.

Reviewed by Bright Nkhatha, Librarian, SAPES Trust, P O Box MP111, Mount Pleasant, Harare. Acknowledgements to SAPEM, Vol 10 No 1 1996 where this review originally appeared.

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