

Editorial

This issue of the Journal has a common thread running through the articles – all authors, at least in part, tackle the serious question of poverty, its socioeconomic consequences, and ways in which a negative socioeconomic situation can be transformed.

Dhemba examines the role of the informal sector in alleviating urban poverty in Zimbabwe. He points out how poverty has increased in developing countries in recent years, which is particularly evident within the growing cities. Poverty alleviation strategies are needed to help the urban poor and Dhemba considers a variety of suggestions to ameliorate this situation. The role of the informal sector is analysed in detail and several useful recommendations to enhance its role in poverty reduction made.

This theme is also explored by Benda-Beckman & Kirsch who report on a GTZ-sponsored seminar held in Malawi on the subject of social security: five countries in the region participated in this discussion. The authors unpack the concept of social security in both its traditional and modern forms; they then identify policy measures which might contribute to the strengthening of social security systems, through a revitalised partnership between NGOs, governments and donors.

Chikwanha-Dzenga continues the theme of poverty in her look at the harsh situation faced by the rural poor in Zimbabwe. She criticises a half-hearted attempt by government to achieve growth with equity and transformation in the rural areas, particularly with regard to the urgent need for land and water. Other recommendations are made, including the development of manufacturing industries and services to support a more genuine rural-centred growth strategy.

Munyae & Mulinga present an interesting and in-depth historical analysis in an attempt to explain the persistence of social problems in sub-Saharan Africa. The article contends that *disintegrative ethnicity* which has been responsible for extreme social conflict in Africa in recent years can be traced back to colonialisation which transformed existing social relations through restructuring of boundaries and discriminatory socioeconomic policies. The authors also examine the concept of corruption and again find historical explanation for current corrupt practices, which have their origin in capitalistic modes of production and previous corrupt colonial administrative structure. While this analysis is not meant to excuse ethnic discrimination and corruption – which need to be exposed – it however deepens our understanding of the complexity of these social problems and challenges simplistic and often racist views about Africa and its social problems.

Odumosu takes the question of poverty to a further dimension through examining one of its consequences – the escalation of criminal activity, using Nigeria

as a case study. Making use of anomie theory, Odumosu suggests that when poverty is coupled with high levels of economic and social aspiration, the stage is set for criminal activity as people will use any means to attain the socially-approved goal of economic success. Transformation of the socioeconomic situation is necessary in order to avert this situation and bring about a *“democratisation of the development process”* through poverty alleviation measures.

Adejumobi provides an insight into the policy of privatisation in relation to social welfare services. This has both positive and negative consequences which the author explores. Again Nigeria is the case example. The author concludes that privatisation in its strictest sense is not suitable in relation to the social welfare sector, as it will lead to further inequality and withdrawal of services, as in the author's view it is *“a dominant class project designed to facilitate capital accumulation, rather than radiating welfare to the majority of the people.”*

The final article, by Ike & Twumasi-Ankrah, investigates the concept of child abuse and child labour within Africa. Definitions can be problematic, especially when cultural myopia refuses to appreciate different standards of child-rearing. However, even with cultural variations, the authors accept the reality of child abuse and child labour and suggest several policy prescriptions aimed at improving the situation and in particular the tackling of poverty and education on child rights.

This is my final issue as editor of the Journal, since taking up the editorship in 1993; I hope it has proved interesting and useful to its readers and wish the best of luck to the new editor for the next issue in 2000.