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## Foreword to the South African PPA

It is an honour to have been invited to write this foreword to the South African Participatory Poverty Assessment. This is not least because it has broken new ground in methods, process, presentation and findings, and because it has the potential to make so much difference for the better.

The most creative evolution of PPAs has been in Africa. Among these, the South African PPA has been unique in its design and process. Alone among PPAs in the world, it facilitated NGOs and researchers to undertake participatory studies in areas where they were already working, and on aspects of deprivation with which they were familiar. Alone among PPAs in the world, it had a transparency of process which was both courageous and outstandingly effective in difficult conditions. It was also unusual in the degree of ethical commitment to follow up with action in the communities which collaborated and gave their time and analysis to the study. The methods used to present and analyse findings were, to the best of my knowledge, new, with care taken not to impose outsiders' professional concepts and categories, but to allow the voices and experiences of poor people to present and construct their own realities. Those who conduct further PPAs, wherever in the world, would do well to study the approach and methods used here, and learn from these South African innovations.

Like its predecessors in Ghana and Zambia, many in the South African PPA used the powerful and popular approaches and methods of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). These "hand over the stick" to local people to conduct their own analysis. Teams were trained, and then applied PRA. They empowered those who were weak, vulnerable, poor and marginalised to express and analyse their experience of deprivation, their problems, priorities and hopes. It is their voices that speak through these pages.

So it is that the findings stand out with sharp immediacy: the often unperceived seasonality of deprivation, even for those receiving pensions; time poverty - the poverty of lack of time among women; the crisis of wellbeing for children; the agony and frustration of trying to obtain justice from an indifferent or hostile administration; the lack of information - "We don't know what we can ask for, we don't know who to ask, and we don't know how to ask"; the isolation and suffering of women with children, deserted by men. The report is loud with the voices of the unheard. Let me not try to summarise. Let them speak for themselves, as they do with such eloquence.

The true test of a PPA is, though, not its methods or process, not its presentation, not its insights, but what difference it makes in practice. Good reports that lead to no change are bad reports. Up to this point, the South African PPA has been outstanding. There has also been commitment at the highest political level to action and follow through. The question is whether that can be sustained and expressed through the detail of changes in laws, administrative orders and procedures, through the allocation of resources, and above all through transforming the behaviour and attitudes of those with legal and administrative power at all levels.

Many of us from other parts of the world have come to look to South Africa for innovation and inspiration, and for showing that good things that seemed impossible can indeed be done. Leadership and example have come in full measure from the painful but peaceful processes of reconciliation, and the demonstration of the healing power of magnanimity and forgiveness. Now it has come too from the open and original processes of this PPA and the insights it has generated, giving voice to those who are marginal and excluded - single mothers, pensioners, old people, children, and others. The great question now is whether what has been expressed in these pages, what is now known, will lead to change, not just to policy-in-principle, but to policy-in-practice, to what happens on the ground, to what touches people and their lives. This will depend on the sustained concern and commitment of political leaders, officials and many other citizens. If South Africa can muster and maintain that concern and commitment, it will once again be a beacon to the rest of humankind.

To the voices of the millions in South Africa and elsewhere whose lives could be transformed by the processes flowing from this PPA, let me add this hope: that those with power, at every level, will seize this great opportunity for deep and lasting changes for the better. If they do, the voices will not have been raised in vain, and the good outcomes will spread, not only in South Africa, but in the rest of the world.

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