

DISCUSSION PAPER

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**The Crisis of Africa's Rural Poor:
perceptions and priorities**
by Robert Chambers

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AGRICULTURE AND RURAL PROBLEMS

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Drawing on the insights of ILO/JASPA missions to seven countries, especially those to Tanzania and Zambia, this paper examines selected aspects of the crisis of poor rural people in sub-Saharan Africa. Rapid rises in population and other factors are likely to exacerbate deprivation in both more accessible 'core' and less accessible 'peripheral' areas. Urban-based professionals tend to underperceive and misperceive this deprivation and some of the priorities of the poor themselves. These include not only health, livelihoods, and basic services, but also an adequate supply of basic goods like matches, soap, salt, sugar, cooking oil, paraffin and clothes which have often become acutely scarce and costly. Remedial measures are suggested, but the danger is recognised that many of the rural poor may remain or become too weak to make effective demands for a better deal.

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
The Perspective: whose crisis?	1
Rural Population and Poverty	2
Deprivation of Core and Periphery	3
Outsiders' Biases:	4
i) biases of contact	5
ii) biases of values	5
iii) lags in learning	6
Whose Priorities?	7
Three Themes:	9
i) survival: health and livelihoods	9
ii) basic goods	10
iii) basic services	13
Action for the Rural Poorer	14
Action by the Rural Poorer	16
Notes	17
References	19

List of tables

1	Aspects of Population Growth in Seven African Countries	2
2	Professional Preferences	6
3	Changes in Controlled Rural Producer Prices in Zambia 1971-79	10
4	Non-availability of Basic Goods in Ten Tanzanian Villages 1980	12

THE CRISIS OF AFRICA'S RURAL POOR: PERCEPTIONS AND PRIORITIES

If we were to give a one sentence definition of a basic needs strategy it might be: a basic needs strategy advocates that the poor groups in society be made the focus of development and helped to meet their most basic human needs.

ILO (Sierra Leone) 1981c:73

The Perspective: whose crisis?

The crisis of development in sub-Saharan Africa is usually analysed from a 'core', top-down, centre-outwards perspective. The national economy and its performance is the point of departure and throughout the main point of reference. The much debated Berg Report - Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 1981) - originated in concern expressed by the African Governors of the World Bank in 1979 at the dim economic prospects for the nations¹ of SSA. They asked that the Bank prepare 'a special paper on the economic development problems of these countries'¹ (my italics). The Report 'discusses the factors that explain slow economic growth in Africa in the recent past, analyses, policy changes and program orientations needed to promote faster growth, and concludes with a set of recommendations to donors...' (World Bank, 1981). Although the Report considers basic services for education and health, it is more preoccupied with the efficiency of services and cost-reduction than with coverage. The critique of the Berg Report published by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS 1983) includes expressions of dismay (e.g. Colclough 1983) at the diminished access to services implied by the recommendations of the Report, but most of the critique starts, as does the Report, with thinking about national economies, their sectors and their external relations.

Debates about national economies are critical. Nothing in this paper should be taken as undervaluing the importance of reversing national economic decline in SSA and increasing the size of the national cakes. Nor is it intended to draw attention away from the part international forces have played in generating national economic crises. The various ILO/JASPA Reports have made these clear enough. But this paper sets out to examine a complementary perspective, that of the poorer rural people.

Nor is this to deny urban deprivation. It has become more acute with food shortages and as the urban informal sector has been saturated. In urban Ghana in early 1981 it took nearly two days' earnings of the minimum wage to buy one loaf of bread (Kofi and Hansen 1981: 52-3). But rural poverty is less visible, involves far larger numbers of people, and is typically deeper and more vulnerable to drought and other disasters. The 1974 household budget survey in Zambia

illustrates relative urban and rural poverty with the finding that 95 per cent of rural households had incomes lower than the average income in urban squatter areas (ILO 1981b vol. 2:35). The focus of this paper is therefore on the crisis of the poorer rural people who, through urban and class biases, usually come last, and the starting point is their numbers and location.

Rural Population and Poverty

The rate and nature of change in rural SSA probably have no historical precedent. Change and poverty have many dimensions, and causes are political, economic and social as well as physical and demographic. But the rate and scale of change is most simply indicated by population growth. Taking the seven countries which invited ILO/JASPA basic needs missions, we find that the rates of population growth in all except Somalia are projected to be higher in 1980 - 2000 than in earlier decades. Estimates of rates of growth have themselves risen. The World Bank's projection for the population of these seven countries by the year 2000 has risen by 10 per cent over the past five years. According to the 1984 projections, the total populations of these countries would almost double (the increase is 88 per cent) in the 18 years from mid-1982 to the year 2000, and Kenya's would more than double.

Table 1: Aspects of Population Growth in Seven African Countries

	<u>Percentage</u> <u>rural</u> <u>in 1982</u>	<u>Population (mn)</u>		<u>Percentage</u> <u>annual growth</u>		
		<u>mid-1982</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>60-70</u>	<u>70-80</u>	<u>80-2000</u>
Kenya	85	18.1	40 (31)	3.2	4.0	4.4
Lesotho	87	1.4	2 (2)	2.0	2.4	2.9
Nigeria	79	90.6	169 (157)	2.5	2.5	3.5
Sierra Leone	77	3.2	5 (6)	1.7	2.0	2.4
Somalia	68	4.5	7 (7)	2.8	2.8	2.4
Tanzania	87	19.8	36 (32)	2.7	3.4	3.5
Zambia	55	6.0	11 (10)	2.6	3.1	3.6
Totals:		143.6	270 (245)			

Source: World Development Report 1984:218, 254, 160. Figures in brackets are estimates of population in the year 2000 given five years earlier in World Development Report 1979:158.

The implications for the rural areas and the rural poor are dramatic. As the Berg Report (World Bank 1981:113) points out for SSA as a whole, since the urban population is relatively small (only 21 per cent in 1980) most of the additional people will begin life in rural areas. Even if the cities were to grow at unprecedented rates, they could only absorb part of the rural increase. If only 60 per cent of the increase remained rural, declining to 50 per cent by the year 2000, the rural population would still be 50 per cent greater in two decades. One concludes that in most countries there will be massive pressure on rural resources and services and intense competition for rural livelihoods.

Patterns and problems differ by country and by region. This can be illustrated by comparing Zambia and Kenya. In Zambia, the dominant feature has been urban bias draining labour from rural areas. Rural deprivation has interlocking regional and demographic dimensions. The more favoured areas, closer to the line of rail, contrast with the remoter, less favoured areas. The less favoured areas have been found (Marter and Honeybone 1976) to have higher proportions of small, labour-scarce and weak households, with higher ratios of dependents, both children and old people, to active adults, about half the average farm size, and very much smaller per capita crop incomes. Male outmigration from these areas is associated with a high proportion of female-headed households, in Luapula Province as high as one third of all households.

In Kenya, the dominant feature is pressure of population on land. The subdivision of land has been rapid in many areas. Estimates suggest that hectares of good agricultural land per person will drop dramatically: in Kiambu and Machakos Districts, halving from 1969 to 1989, from 0.40 and 0.36 to 0.20 and 0.18 hectares per person respectively (Livingstone 1981, vol. 2:5). However, the single most important way in which population pressure has been absorbed is spontaneous rural to rural migration, which is more significant than rural to urban. It has been marked in the past decade as families have moved in search of land. Evidence (Migot-Adholla cited in Livingstone 1981, vol. 2:14) indicates that those who move have come over time from less poor sections of the community than before. As Livingstone observes, 'Given the inevitable increase in land pressure, and the associated poverty, it is evidently serious if it requires wealth to migrate, since the poverty of those remaining will tend to be reinforced' (Livingstone 1981, vol. 2:14). Much of the migration has been to semi-arid regions where unstable and risky agriculture competes with and displaces pastoralists.

Deprivation of Core and Periphery

One conclusion from this comparison is the care needed in generalising. In Kenya the families moving to remoter areas, though poor, are not the poorest and are likely to be

physically strong. In Zambia, many households left in the remoter areas are physically weak, drained of manpower by rural-urban migration. In Kenya, a dominant feature of rural poverty is pressure on resources. In Zambia where land is still locally abundant, it is a labour constraint.

Two categories of deprivation are suggested by this comparison: that of the rural core, and that of the rural periphery. Typically, core deprivation is found in areas which are more accessible, of higher potential, with more developed economies and better services, and where population is concentrated and pressure on land intense. Typically, peripheral deprivation is found in areas which are less accessible, of lower potential, with less developed economies, worse services, more scattered population, and (though not always) less pressure on land. Both core and peripheral deprivation include those too poor or too weak to migrate but the patterns of deprivation also differ: shops, markets and services are physically available for the core poor, but they often lack the means to make use of them; for the peripheral poor, shops, markets and services often do not exist. For the core poor, isolation is largely economic, a function of livelihood; for the peripheral poor it is, in addition, a function of distance, roads and transport. For the core poor, a basic problem is effective demand; for the peripheral poor, it is often effective supply. Contrast the core poverty of the women interviewed in Kakamega by Joseph Ssenyonga (1976:11) who said they had not eaten for three days, although there must have been food for sale in the shops nearby, with the peripheral poverty of women in the Chambeshi valley in Zambia who were prepared to do a day's work threshing paddy for payment in kind of about 100 gm of salt⁴ because salt was so scarce in their remote area (ILO 1981b:23).

Whether core or peripheral, rural deprivation has many dimensions of which five of the more obvious are poverty (lack of wealth, lack of income), physical weakness (lack of strength, high dependency ratios), isolation (remoteness, lack of education), vulnerability (to becoming more deprived still), and powerlessness (economic, social and political) (Chambers 1983:108-14). The crisis of the rural poor could be described along any of these dimensions. Their relative importance varies by individual, gender, household, region and country. There is consequently much scope for selective perception and misleading generalisation and prescription on the part of elite outsiders. Which dimensions, if any, are perceived, and what solutions are recommended, depend not only on the objective reality but at least as much on those who perceive and recommend, their biases, contacts and predilections. In an attempt to get closer to the reality, let us examine and try to offset some of the more obvious outsiders' biases.

Outsiders' Biases

Elite outsiders - meaning those who are neither rural nor poor - suffer from biases of contact and of values as a result of which rural poverty is underperceived and misperceived,⁵ and they are often out of date in their perceptions.

i) biases of contact. For most outsiders, most of the time, contact with the poorer rural people occurs only through rural development tourism, the phenomenon of the brief and hurried rural visit from an urban centre. This imposes six biases against contact with and learning from the poorer rural people. These are spatial - close to urban centre, tarmac roads, roadsides, and the centres of villages, and in regions which are less remote within a country, in all cases precisely where the poorer people are less likely to be found; project - towards places where there are projects; person - towards those that are better off, men rather than women, users of services and adopters of practices rather than non-users and non-adopters, and those who are active, present and living; seasonal - avoiding the bad times of the wet or very hot seasons; diplomatic - not seeking out the poorer for fear of giving offence; and professional - confined to the outsider's specialisation. These biases interlock so that much rural deprivation goes unrecognised; and the worst is almost entirely unseen.

These biases have been exacerbated in rural Africa and elsewhere during the past decade by the rise in oil prices, foreign exchange crises, and cuts in government recurrent budgets: the rise in oil prices reduced fuel availability for government services; foreign exchange crises curtailed imports of vehicles and spare parts, as well as oil; and cuts in Government budgets fell, as usual, most heavily on items other than staff salaries, with the transport vote as a favourite victim where the effects of cuts would not show. In Zambia, the Ministry of Agriculture's votes were so reduced that in 1980 it was possible to buy only one-fifth of the petrol that could be bought in 1973 (ILO 1981b:74). When fuel is scarce, travel is restricted to essentials such as collecting staff pay and visits by VIPs. The older and more decrepit vehicles become, the more reluctant staff are to take them on bad roads. The consequences have been unseen but devastating: a shrink back of travel and contact; a decline in peripheral services; and even less contact than before between elite outsiders like government staff and the poorer people, especially those of the peripheries.

ii) biases of values. Outsiders also suffer from biases of learning and thinking which impede recognition and understanding of the predicament of the rural poor. Outsiders are conditioned to suppose that learning comes from the classroom, the textbook, the training course, the university.

It is rare to find a course on rural poverty. Rural people, especially the poor, are regarded as ignorant, and it can be difficult for outsiders to recognise that there is much to learn from them. It is the poor, though, who are the greatest experts on their problems, strategies and priorities.

Outsiders are also conditioned to value, notice and prefer whatever is described as modern, sophisticated and scientific, and to look down on the things which are important to the poor. Several biases interlock, and can be illustrated by a list of what some might describe as 'sophisticated' and 'primitive'.

Thus in government programmes, research and extension, tractors are preferred to oxen, exotic cattle to native, cattle to sheep and goats, exotic trees to indigenous, cash crops to subsistence crops, and chemical fertiliser to organic. And preferences such as these tend to reduce the relevance of government programmes, research and extension for those who most need help.

Table 2: Professional Preferences

<u>'Sophisticated'</u>	<u>'Primitive'</u>
Urban	Rural
Industrial	Agricultural
High cost	Low cost
Capital-using	Labour-using
Mechanical	Animal or human
Inorganic	Organic
Large	Small
Modern	Traditional
Exotic	Indigenous
Marketed	Subsistence
Quantified	Unquantified
Geometrical	Irregular
Visible and seen	Invisible or unseen
Tidy	Untidy
Predictable	Unpredictable
Hard	Soft
Clean	Dirty
Odourless	Smelly

(Adapted from Chambers 1983:173)

iii) lags in learning. A third bias is delayed learning. The rates of change in rural SSA are rapid and will continue to be so. Where population doubles in 20 years or less, one can be seriously misled in reading a report or article written two or three years earlier, based on fieldwork two or three years before that, and citing secondary data which are even older.⁸ Thinking similarly lags. Minds are set in a growth model. Little analysis has been undertaken of economic

decline as a phenomenon, of the shrink-back of markets and contact from peripheries, of the slide back into subsistence and barter which has occurred in so much of rural SSA.

These three biases - of contact, of values, and of lags in learning - can combine so that less and less is known of the condition of the rural poorer, especially of the peripheral poorer. This makes prescriptions by outsiders more and more liable to error, and offsetting the biases more and more important. In doing this, one useful antidote is to enquire, again and again, about the priorities of the poorer rural people themselves.

Whose Priorities?

The three biases influence the priorities which elite outsiders assume for the rural poor. Urban, industrial and formal sector concerns are liable to be applied to rural conditions where they do not always fit. In a statement on basic needs in 1976, the Director-General of the ILO wrote:

The satisfaction of basic needs means meeting of the minimum requirements of a family for personal consumption: food, shelter, clothing; it implies access to essential services, such as safe drinking-water, sanitation, transport, health and education; it implies that each person available for and willing to work should have an adequately remunerated job.

(ILO 1976:7)

Similarly, the Nigeria Constitution of 1978 laid down that the state 'shall direct its policy towards ensuring ... that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, a reasonable national minimum living wage as well as social security benefits would be provided for all citizens'. (Clause 16(2), cited in ILO 1981a:v).

For most of the rural poor, however, the concepts of a job as in the ILO statement or of a minimum living wage as in the Nigeria Constitution, are irrelevant. Most of the rural poor are either subsistence or sub-subsistence cultivators, and many of them piece together their precarious livelihoods through repertoires of different activities at different seasons of the year.

As the ILO Report for Nigeria pointed out (1981a:11) basic needs have tended to consist of a rather subjective list, lacking a unifying focus. The Nigeria Report concentrated on health as the central requirement, seeing some other basic needs as means towards this. The Tanzania Report in contrast, presented a more general list, giving the various elements of basic needs as 'employment, nutrition, health, water, sanitation, shelter, education, transport, energy and people's participation' (ILO 1982:xv).

One may ask: whose lists are these? And based on what investigations? All elite outsiders know what is good for the poor, but it is surely the poor themselves who know best what they want. When asked, their priorities may surprise and even shock outsiders. In Botswana, one village wanted a South African mine recruiting agency. Reginald Green has noted the practical dangers of speculating abstractly on this: '... in one Tanzanian region the top priority of a significant proportion of villages was "vermin control" (i.e. either shotguns and cartridges or government employees with them to reduce baboon damage to crops), not, one fancies, a result anybody predicted (nor, unfortunately, one the Kigoma Intergrated Rural Development Project took seriously)' (1983:185-6).

For all the rhetoric about participation, it is still rare enough for villages, let alone the poorer people in villages, to be consulted about their priorities: or, if they are consulted, for their preferences to be a source of learning and official action.

A significant exception was a study commissioned by the Basic Needs Mission to Tanzania in 1980, and carried out under the supervision of S.M. Wangwe of the University of Dar es Salaam. A quick consultation was conducted by students in 10 villages in nine regions. This informal survey may itself have included biases - in selection of villages, and who within the villages was consulted. (There is for example no indication to what extent women were interviewed.) Nevertheless, the villagers' reported priorities are striking in their consistency and in the manner in which they diverge from and add to those of outsiders. The Mission was surprised that every report stated that there was no danger of deforestation, although at the national level this had become a problem.¹⁰

Nor did villagers see sanitation or housing as serious problems. Supplies for services - teaching materials and textbooks for education, medicines and equipment for dispensaries - were stressed. When asked to rank their five basic needs, in most cases these were: food, water, dispensary, transport and essential commodities. The Mission's assessment was that: 'There seems little doubt that if villagers were pressed to give priorities to their main needs the first place would have gone to the supply of essential consumer goods.' (ILO 1982:285.)

Yet the ILO list of basic needs did not explicitly include essential consumer goods as a category. In industrial, rich country and growth-oriented experience and thinking, the availability of essential consumer goods is taken for granted.

One conclusion is that there can be nothing final about any list of basic needs; that each person, household, village and region may have different priorities;¹¹ that these will change

over time; and that outsiders must be wary and self-doubting in promoting their own lists.

Three themes

With this caveat, three themes appear to deserve discussion, representing likely priorities of many of the rural poorer of SA: survival - health and livelihood; basic goods; and basic services. What priority they deserve will vary. In particular, the balance between livelihood and basic goods can be expected to vary between conditions of core deprivation where goods are available but livelihoods difficult for the poorer, to peripheral deprivation in which both livelihoods and goods are hard to come by.

i) survival: health and livelihoods

The rapidly rising populations of SSA reflect gains in health and livelihoods, albeit gains which quite often look precarious. Although health and livelihoods are basic to survival, both have a value which goes much further than survival. The Nigeria Basic Needs Mission made a case for putting health, both physical and mental, in a positive sense right at the centre. And livelihood should be much more than just a means to survival, contributing through the satisfactions of work to the quality of life.

Of the two, livelihood is perhaps more misunderstood by urban elite outsiders. For most rural people, the term 'livelihood' fits their circumstances, wants and needs better than either 'employment' or 'job'. A livelihood can be defined as a level of wealth and of stocks and flows of food and cash which provide for physical and social wellbeing and for security against impoverishment. This definition points less towards employment or a job, and more towards seeking to assure command over flows of food and cash, over productive assets, and over assets which can be buffers against contingencies, enabling poor people to meet sudden or major needs. The significance of buffers deserves stress. Almost everywhere, the poor have become more vulnerable to contingencies through the weakening of traditional social support which could be relied on in distress and need. At the same time, urban and formal sector thinking sees poverty most in terms of income. While income, in its broad sense including subsistence flows, is vital for poor rural people as for others, they also have a greater need now for buffers or cushions against disaster (such as small stock which can be sold at any time) than they had in the past.

For the poorer rural producers some of the more critical elements in a livelihood are likely to be access to and ownership of land; micro-capital like tools and equipment; some livestock; remunerative activities in the slack seasons of the year; health to be able to work at the peak seasons;

and markets and good prices for whatever they are able to produce for sale. In practice, rural-urban terms of trade often turn against rural producers (Lipton 1977). In Zambia, between 1965 and 1980 the shift was a factor of three, meaning that rural producers had to sell three times as much to buy a shirt, soap or a box of matches (ILO 1981b:xxvi). Moreover, this understates the true shift because, especially in remoter rural areas, black market prices were higher than controlled prices. Even worse, the terms of trade also shifted most precisely against the poorer rural producers. Prices for maize grown and sold mainly by better off farmers were relatively well maintained because of the powerful lobby of large-scale maize producers; prices for the fish, charcoal, sorghum, cassava and honey produced by the poorer people lagged far behind.

Table 3: Changes in controlled rural producer prices in Zambia 1971-79

	1971	1979	Percentage change 1971-9
Maize	4.00	9.00	125
Dried fish	31.00	50.00	61
Charcoal	1.75	2.50	43
Sorghum	4.70	6.00	28
(Low income urban price index)	100	242	(142)
			(ILO 1981b-65)

ii) basic goods

In earlier thinking, basic goods were taken for granted. As economic growth took place, shops and supplies penetrated the peripheries. With economic decline, they have in many places withdrawn. But the biases of rural visits and timelags in learning sustain rosy impressions. Thus the Berg Report: 'Indeed, even the most casual visitor to a market town in Africa has to come away impressed by the range of goods and services available for sale, their variety and quality gradations, as well as by the evident dynamism and liveliness of the bargaining that characterises the simplest transaction ...' (World Bank 1981: 64-65).

This may be true in some economies, especially in their urban sectors. It is not true in others. In Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Uganda, to name but four, there has been a shrink back, a retraction, of commercial supplies and contact. In 1980 in Zambia, one could visit villages where there were well-built shops which had been closed for several years. Near Chungu in Luwingu District, where years earlier even bicycles had been on sale, there was only one small shop still open, selling but a few items. Many basic goods were not available in most rural areas - soap, salt, blankets, cooking

oil, paraffin, matches and the like. In Luapula Province, unavailability or high prices of goods such as glue, nails, gas bottles, leather, wax, needles, and cotton thread had forced many small artisans and businesses to give up during the previous five years (ILO 1981b, vol. 2:129). Many basic goods were subject to regulated prices which made no allowance for transport costs, and rural traders were vulnerable to prosecution if they sold above the regulated price. In these circumstances, there was no incentive to move goods out of urban centres, except for those who bought and then sold as hawkers on the black market, often at several times the regulated price. Shortages and price regulation not only deprived the rural people, and the peripheral poor most of all; through generating a high-priced black market, they also tilted the rural urban terms of trade even more against the rural side.

The most striking evidence concerning basic goods comes from the village surveys conducted for the Tanzania Basic Needs mission (Table 4). In all 10 villages, mattresses were reported either not available at all or at best irregularly available. In nine of the 10 villages, this applied to cooking oil, salt, soap, sugar, batteries and paraffin. Soap was named in eight, clothes and radios in seven, and matches and insecticides in five.

The most obvious explanations of these shortages are decline in the Tanzanian national economy and its causes, international and national; and problems of production and supply. But another cause was the prolonged hostility of party and bureaucracy to private rural trade, at first directed against Asian traders, and later with Operation Maduka in 1976 against all traders. Operation Maduka required the closing down of all private retail outlets in the rural areas and the creation of communal shops in their place. The immediate result was acute shortages of basic goods such as sugar, salt, paraffin, soap and matchboxes (Hyden 1980:132). It is perhaps no coincidence that the village (No. 5 in Table 4) in the survey with fewest shortages was the only one reported as having a private as well as a village (communal) shop.

Basic goods are fundamental for other basic needs: agricultural tools and artisans' equipment and supplies for productive work and livelihoods; clothing, salt, soap and simple medicines for health; paper, pencils and pens for education; bicycle and other vehicle spare parts for transport; iron tools for the construction of shelter. Medicaments can provide one illustration. Basic medicines and remedies can be supplied through the market and its retail outlets. In rural areas in many parts of the world, small shops stock anti-malarials, aspirins, antiseptics and other medicines. The village storekeeper was among those to whom David Werner addressed his excellent handbook Where There is No Doctor (1977), recognising the small trader as a person who

could give simple medical guidance to customers. But first there have to be stores and storekeepers.

Not surprisingly, both the Zambia and the Tanzania Basic Needs Missions recommended measures for the revival of rural trade.

Table 4: Non-availability of Basic Goods in 10 Tanzanian Villages, 1980

	Village										Total	Total 'Not available'
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Mattresses	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10	7
Cooking oil	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	9	6
Salt		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9	2
Sugar	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	9	2
Batteries	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	9	4
Paraffin	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	9	5
Mabati 1	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9	8
Soap		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	8	2
Clothes	x	x	x		x	x	x			x	7	1
Radios		x	x	x		x	x	x		x	7	4
Matches		x				x	x		x	x	5	0
Insecticides		x	x				x		x	x	5	3
Jembe 2				x		x	x			x	4	3
Blankets		x		x						x	3	2

1. Corrugated iron sheets.
2. Hoes.

Source: ILO 1982:286-97.

Note: The items marked were variously recorded as 'not available', 'in acute short supply' (village 3), 'irregular supply', 'available only occasionally', and 'not regularly available'.

		<u>Village</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Region</u>
Key to villages:	1	Mwanyumba	Muheza	Tanga
	2	Ilolunguru	Tabora	Tabora
	3	Mahaha	Magu	Mwanza
	4	Ndoombo	Arumeru	Arusha
	5	Image	Iringa	Iringa
	6	Veyuma	Dodoma	Dodoma
	7	Kitungwa	Morogoro	Morogoro
	8	Buswahili	Musoma	Mara
	9	Lipingo	Mbinga	Ruvuma
	10	Baraki	Tarime	Mara

Not only shrinking economies and supplies, but also Government policies of pricing and licensing had squeezed, ruined and eliminated innumerable small rural trading enterprises. In

consequence, many rural people had been acutely deprived, over and above their previous poverty. As Joan Robinson once put it, 'The misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited at all' (1962, quoted in Streeten 1983: 875). The vast rural majority would almost certainly agree, and would prefer exploitation by private traders to the effects of harassment of private traders by bureaucracy, party and state. For basic goods are basic needs; and they are almost always best supplied through private retail trade.

iii) basic services

Many services can be considered basic, including the supply of agricultural inputs, marketing of agricultural produce, and services for health, water supply, education and transport.

In stagnant or declining economies, as in Zambia and Tanzania, these present a common pattern. In earlier periods of expansion, capital investment built and extended physical facilities such as offices, roads, schools, health centres, and water supplies, intensifying their coverage in the rural cores, and pushing them further out into the rural peripheries. Staff were increased. Recurrent budgets rose. When more stringent conditions came (especially after the oil price rise in 1973) cuts were made in recurrent budgets. These fell least on staff and most on maintenance and repair (of roads, vehicles, buildings, water supplies), transport (fuel and spares), and supplies (textbooks, teaching materials, drugs, paraffin for refrigerators to maintain the cold chain for vaccines, and so on). Again and again the result was physical facilities with staff in place but without adequate means to run them. In Luapula Province in Zambia in 1981, only six per cent of expenditures under the Lima (agricultural) programme were directly related to the action end of the programme (production units, vegetable gardens, poultry units, fish ponds, and demonstration plots) (Kalumba 1982:36-7). The Zambia Mission found many similar cases (ILO 1982b Vol. 2:91-114). Especially but not only in the peripheral areas, the quality and reliability of services was hit, the morale of staff damaged, and the confidence of the public undermined.

To distant officials in the IMF in Washington, or in offices in Lusaka, Dodoma or other capitals, the effects of recurrent budget cuts on the poorer are unseen. But one illustration from the Zambia Basic Needs Report (ILO 1982b:75) can make the point:

'A woman who lives 15 km from the nearest health centre has a sick child. The difficulties of travel are such that her decision whether to take the child to the health centre is in the balance. If she hears that the centre is short of drugs, and occasionally out of them altogether, she may not risk a fruitless journey. The child may then

suffer avoidably, or die. If, on the other hand, she knows that the health centre is always adequately stocked, and all comers are in consequence treated, she may decide to go. The child may then suffer less, and live. It is innumerable, individual, unseen ways like this that the benefits of adequate recurrent allocations reach the poorer, weaker and more remote people. Those who make the allocations can never know the wide ramifications of their decisions: but imagination can suggest the costs and benefits of those decisions to those who are unseen.'
(italics in original)

As emphasised in the Zambia and Tanzania Reports, the priorities are (contrary to the biases of project aid) to reduce investment and increase recurrent expenditure, thus raising capacity utilisation and improving the quality and reliability of services, whether they are schools, health centres, water supplies, roads, or agricultural programmes. Some judicious changes, for example buying 131 bicycles for the cost of one Landrover (ILO 1982b:75), can help. Some simplifications, for example in national drug formularies, can save money and increase coverage. Beyond this, to make past investments and existing recurrent commitments for staff more effective, the marginal benefits from additional funds for supplies and maintenance will be very high, especially where these can be pushed out into the neglected peripheries.

Action for the Rural Poorer

Many analysts allow themselves to be misled into supposing that direct solutions to obvious problems will make things better for everyone, including by implication the rural poorer. Overcoming the development crisis of SSA so that growth takes the place of decline is one such solution; trying to attack population growth with massive family planning campaigns is another. But growth does not of itself assure that gains will go to the rural poorer - urban dwellers and the wealthier rural producers may appropriate them. Nor does a smaller family necessarily benefit poor parents for whom more children make sense because many children die and they need children for support in old age. Growth and population control are needed in the wider social interest, but particular poor households need benefits which are personal and tangible.

As we have seen, these can be sought through livelihoods which give them subsistence and cash and through an effective supply of basic goods and services. To enable them to command these, many measures can be proposed, and which are best will vary. Some of the more widely applicable are the following:¹²

A. Livelihoods: subsistence and effective demand

- i. buffers for the poorer. Vulnerability to contingencies,

and the need for buffers or reserves to meet them, implies programmes to enable more of the poorer households to own assets such as goats, sheep, poultry, cattle, trees, and savings accounts which can be sold or cashed when in need.

- ii. R and D for the poorer. Most R and D, whether biological (agricultural, forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries) or mechanical (for tools, transport, processing) takes place in resource-rich environments and is suitable only for rural people who are resource-rich. Agricultural and mechanical R and D in resource-poor conditions and with the poorer people as professional colleagues and clients can generate technologies which fit the needs and resources of the more deprived - micro-farmers with tiny plots, women heads of households, farmers in semi-arid peripheries, herders of smallstock, and so on.
 - iii. micro-capital. Many poorer households lack critical items of micro-capital - animal-drawn implements, basic equipment for wells, good agricultural tools, or simple machines for processing crops. Tractors are often heavily subsidised. The case for subsidising micro-capital, on both social and economic grounds, is usually much stronger.
 - iv. prices and markets. Higher floor prices and better marketing for whatever the poorer can produce in surplus to sell (cassava, millets, sorghum, fish, charcoal, honey), are two straightforward ways of helping them to be less poor in a self-reliant manner.
- B. Supply of basic goods and services
- i. augmenting the supply of basic goods. To reverse the shrink back in the supply of basic goods, where it has occurred, requires increased supplies (through local production with backward linkages where possible, but otherwise through imports) and encouraging private rural retailing without price restrictions, or with limited restrictions which allow realistically for transport costs and profit margins.
 - ii. Improving basic services. Of many measures, as argued above, the most universal are to increase the supplies needed to run services effectively and to enhance staff mobility.

In the straitened circumstances in which many governments in SSA find themselves, policy and programme decisions are more critical for the rural poorer than in the past. Conditions also change fast. One problem is how governments can keep in touch with the reality. Monitoring particular households and other systematic methods of rapid appraisal are one means that does not appear to have received adequate trials. Somehow the

implications of central decisions to the poorer rural people have to be brought home to those who make them. When conditions are bad, small things mean more. The difference in quality of life between having soap and not having it, or between having salt and not having it, is not normally experienced by most of those whose decisions affect their availability. One of the main lessons of the Basic Needs Missions and Reports is the importance of reflection on the impact of central decisions and allocations on the rural poor. For this, imagination, commitment and courage are required, to offset the forces which draw and allocate resources to those who need them least, and to ensure that a greater share is commanded by those who are poorer, weaker, and more at risk.

Action by the Rural Poorer

This paper could end on that pious note. But the sad and brutal fact is that elites as a whole rarely care for their unseen poorer compatriots unless their plight is forcefully brought to their attention, backed by political power. To this commonplace of social and political history contemporary sub-Saharan Africa is no exception. In Zambia, organised interests - the large farmers in the Zambia National Farmers' Union and the mineworkers through their union - have been powerful and effective pressure groups. In contrast, impoverished fisherpeople, women heads of households, charcoal burners, growers of sorghum, cassava and beans, and beekeepers have been scattered, unorganised, inarticulate, out of sight and out of mind. They have needed, but have not had, their own organisations to counterbalance urban and elite power and to negotiate and secure fair prices and effective services.¹³

The danger is that with economic stagnation or decline, and with rapidly rising populations, poor rural people will be too preoccupied with survival and too isolated and politically weak to combine and demand a better deal. If international and domestic conditions lead to economic growth, and if more political leaders, bureaucrats and others of the elites put the rural poor first in deed as well as word, then their chances will be better. But the best hope for them, with or without growth, with or without allies in the elites, would seem to lie in organised pressure to secure a bigger and fairer share of the cake. For, in the vicissitudes of economic growth and decline, unless they can exercise more power, they will continue to be the last to gain and the first to lose.

FOOTNOTES

1. I am much indebted to those in Zambia who helped and contributed to the rural work of the ILO/JASPA Basic Needs Mission of 1980, not least colleagues on the Mission, especially Janice Jiggins with whom I shared responsibility for the rural section, and Hans Singer for useful comments on a draft. In writing it, I have also drawn on other sources, especially ILO/JASPA (Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa) Basic Needs Reports (ILO 1977, 1979, 1981a, b, c, 1982, and Livingstone 1981). The paper was written as a contribution to an ILO/JASPA volume The Challenge of Employment in Africa to be published by Oxford University Press in 1985. Responsibility for errors and opinions is mine alone and not that of any organisation or other person.
2. For a revealing study of the conditions of spontaneous settlement in Kenya, see Mbithi and Barnes 1975. For the conditions of 'spontaneous' rural refugee settlement, see Chambers 1979.
3. The interviews were in Kakamega District in Western Kenya, an area of very dense population and numerous markets and shops.
4. This was equivalent, at the controlled price for salt, to one fiftieth of the minimum rural wage and one hundredth of the minimum urban wage.
5. For a fuller presentation, see Chambers 1983:4-27 and 104-108.
6. Visiting Monze in Zambia in June 1980, I asked whether I would find the District Agricultural Officer in his office and was told 'You won't find him anywhere else'. His vehicle was due for boarding and was virtually useless. His petrol allocation was one 44 gallon drum for three months, but even this arrived late. He had last been out of station two months earlier, in April, to a field day and that was through help from another department.
7. Also in Zambia in June 1980, the vehicle I had been lent had difficulty on dusty roads off the tarmac because there were no spares available for its defective air filter. Thus a foreign exchange crisis, by creating shortages of spare parts, accentuated tarmac bias.
8. The sources for this paper show that this point about out-of-dateness is at least not itself out-of-date.
9. It continued: 'It should further imply the satisfaction of needs of a more qualitative nature: a healthy, humane and satisfying environment, and popular participation in

the making of decisions that affect the lives and livelihood of the people and individual freedoms.'

10. The perception of deforestation as a problem reflects the spatial biases of rural development tourism. Trees are most cut for firewood near urban centres and along roadsides and are often abundant elsewhere. One unfortunate result is the failure to recognise and exploit the vast natural renewable energy reserves and potentials of the bush of much of Tanzania and Zambia. Most transport in the rural peripheries of those countries could be powered by the known technologies of producer gas from wood (Foley and Barnard 1983), thus saving foreign exchange, generating income round the year for wood collectors and sellers, and probably providing cheaper transport. The energy required for a vehicle a day on a remote road in Zambia could be provided indefinitely with natural regeneration by the equivalent of a roadside strip only two metres wide. 15 kg. of wood are equivalent to about 4 gallons of petrol. (ILO 1981b:76.)
11. Whether defined as basic needs or not, poor rural people may want protection against ethnic violence, theft, vermin, Police, Army, the Party, or bureaucrats; recreation; freedom to practice their customs; and many other things.
12. For more details, the reader is referred to the various ILO Reports cited. The list here has special reference to Zambia, for which see ILO 1982b and also Chambers and Singer 1981:41-4.
13. In the Zambia Report (1981b:82) the exact opposite of this point was made in the text through an error in typesetting which omitted a whole line. As printed, the Report read 'In contrast, The Mineworkers' Union and the ZCTU (Zambia Confederation of Trade Unions) speak and negotiate for the charcoal-burners, the bee-keepers ...' This is precisely not the case. The interests of the Mineworkers' Union and of the ZCTU are in low prices for rural produce, while those of the fisherpeople, cassava, sorghum and bean growers, charcoal-burners and bee-keepers are in high prices for rural produce. The Report suggested a National Rural Producers' Union to represent small-scale rural producers, with sections for special interests. This did not feature in the recommendations of the 1983 National Seminar held on the Report (Ncube, Serpell and Mwali 1983).

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