

1 Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, Africa will be remembered for two historic events: the rise of the popular movement that led to the downfall of apartheid in South Africa, and the human catastrophe involving the massacre of more than a million people in Rwanda. If the one was achieved through the mobilisation of the majority for a democratic alternative for social development, the other was fuelled by pressures to comply with an externally defined agenda for social development designed to open its markets for the needs of capital.

These events represent the extremes of hope and despair that have come to characterise much of the continent in recent years. Every country in the region contains the mixture of factors that can lead to either outcome – a future built on respect for human dignity, or one torn apart by conflicts. Such outcomes will be determined by a number of factors, not least of which will be the nature and implementation of social policies.

But in the era of 'globalisation', the capacity of African countries to determine the goals and content of social policy has been radically constrained. Internationally, globalisation has meant that the rich have got richer, the poor poorer. While the average income of the top 20 per cent of the world's population was 30 times that of the bottom 20 per cent in 1960, by 1990 it was 60 times, and by 1997, 74 times that of the lowest fifth. By the late 1990s, 20 per cent of the world's population had 86 per cent of world GDP, while the bottom 20 per cent had 1 per cent. Nearly one quarter of the world's people have an income that is less than \$1 a day – a proportion that is rising.

In this article, I argue that the majority of people in Africa appear to have less control over their destiny and the goals of social development than they had at independence – arguably, less control than ever. Through international financial institutions and development agencies, the advanced capitalist world is increasingly defining the agenda for social and economic development in Africa. This has had disastrous effects on Africa's poor. To understand how this has come about one must trace the emergence of social policy in the region from colonial times to the present.

Social Policy and Rights in Africa

*From Social
Contract to Loss of
Self-determination*

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2 Social Policy in the Age of the 'Social Contract'

Colonial government social services for Africans were minimal. Social policy was geared towards ensuring the integrity of the structures of colonial rule and a reasonably efficient exploitation of the colony. The goals of social development (such as they were) were defined in the metropolis. Social services were not, however, completely absent. Health services were provided during serious epidemics, principally to prevent infections spreading into white society. Limited education was provided when certain basic skills were deemed necessary for the administration or exploitation of the colony. Charities and missionary groups (the precursors of modern NGOs) exchanged their spiritual wares for social services. Implementation of social policy was 'decentralised' to Native Authorities whose function was to maintain social control in the rural reserves. Although on the eve of independence there were to be significant changes in the extent to which investments were to be made in the social sectors, for the most part the state's function in these sectors was to provide only for a minority.¹

The situation changed dramatically at independence. One of the most remarkable, yet least acknowledged, achievements of independence governments was that, within a few years, access to health services and education became effectively universal. It is a tribute to the capacity of the state to implement such far-reaching social programmes, even though the quality of services had many shortcomings. The impact was reflected in dramatic improvements in life expectancy, mortality rates, nutritional status, literacy, and education by the end of the 1970s. Aggregate figures for sub-Saharan Africa show that life expectancy increased from 38 years in 1960 to 47 years in 1978, despite the fact that GNP per capita increased only modestly from \$222 to \$280 (World Bank 1981). These achievements challenge the current, largely ideologically motivated, caricature of the state as 'inefficient' and unable to deliver effective services.²

There were two major reasons for the substantial social investments made by independence governments. First, the credibility and legitimacy of nationalist independence movements was based on the 'social contract' – the promise to end the social injustices of the colonial era. The post-war era of

popular mobilisation was initially informed less by abstract concepts of self-determination, than by struggles for basic everyday rights. The spark for most people was the need to organise around basic rights to food and shelter, and basic freedoms of association, speech and movement.³ Political independence was achieved through nationalist leaderships capturing the imagination of these movements, uniting them in the promise that only through self-determination and independence could their aspirations be achieved.

Second, 'donors' were favourably disposed towards such a project. If the former colonies were to be integrated into the new world economy, then a form of structural adjustment – or 'modernisation' – was required. The road to 'development' was seen as state investment in the social sectors, while creating an enabling environment for the private sector.⁴ Public opinion in advanced capitalist countries was also favourable to the new foreign policy of making good some of the ills of the past.

The critical point here is that social policy was determined, or at least strongly influenced, by the mass movement. It was designed to meet needs that were defined by that movement, and which people believed they had a right to expect their government to provide. Insofar as those who now controlled the state were bound by the (albeit unwritten and informal) social contract, some degree of accountability could be said to exist between the government and the people. But that degree of accountability was not, in most cases, to persist.

3 Social Policy and the Depoliticisation of Poverty

Once in power, the nationalist leadership saw its task as one of preventing 'centrifugal forces' from competing for political power or seeking greater autonomy from the newly formed 'nation'. The state defined for itself an interventionist role in 'modernisation' and a centralising and controlling role in the political realm. Social pluralism began to be frowned upon. The popular associations that had thrown the nationalist leadership into power gradually began to be seen as an obstacle to the new god of 'development'. No longer was there a need, it was argued, for popular participation: the new

governments would bring development to the people. Social and economic improvements would come with patience and as a result of combined national effort involving all classes (*harambee*, in Kenyatta's famous slogan). In this early period after independence, civil and political rights came to be seen as a luxury, to be enjoyed in the future when 'development' had been achieved. For the present, said many African presidents, 'our people are not ready' – mirroring, ironically, the same arguments used by the former colonial rulers against nationalists a few years earlier.

At the same time as the social infrastructure was being built with the financial support of 'aid agencies', a transformation led to a demobilisation of the popular movement that had given rise to independence. Popular organisations that had emerged out of the struggle for rights were discouraged from having a role in the process. Rights were now codified and rarefied in laws whose relevance was determined by the self-proclaimed, and increasingly unaccountable, guardians of the state. Concerns about rights and justice were gradually replaced by concerns about 'development'. The 'problem' was no longer, it appeared, the denial of basic rights, but one of 'poverty'. While the one demanded action to prevent violations, the other inspired only pity and preoccupations about the technically 'correct' approaches to 'poverty alleviation'.

Certainly there were major problems faced by the newly independent states in addressing how the forces of production (whether industrial or agricultural) could be developed to drag Africa out of the destitution created by colonial rule. But the discourse was not about development in the sense of developing productive forces.⁵ Nor was it one that recognised that poverty was the result of a denial of basic rights. Instead, it was about advancing the capacity of the new ruling class to accumulate and of international capital to continue its exploitation.

The structures of accountability and democracy inherent to rights' movements were replaced by bureaucratic and centralised decision-making under the guise of 'national planning'. Political associations were discouraged, if not actually banned, while trade unions were constrained, incorporated into the structures of the ruling party,

or simply disbanded. The political hegemony of the new post-independence rulers had been asserted.

Those in control of the state and its organs discovered that the state machinery was a significant source of wealth. Some, like Nyerere, sought to control the use of the state as a source of accumulation. But in other countries, access to the state became an end in itself amongst the elite. Favour, patronage, and corruption increasingly came to be seen as a means for limiting competition to the state itself. In many cases, the most cohesive force able to compete was the armed forces. Certainly in West and Central Africa, *coups d'état* became (and sadly remain) commonplace.

But the 'misuse' of the state was to become a critical factor in the transformations brought to the development agenda. Development programmes were brought not to where there was the greatest social or economic need, but to where investment would favour particular social or 'ethnic' groups whose political alliance was deemed useful at a particular time, and where possibilities for accumulation by the elite were greatest.

Under such conditions, it was hardly surprising that competition for access to resources increasingly manifested itself along 'ethnic' lines. With the demise of organisations based on the struggle for rights, old social alliances based on perceived historical grievances against other 'ethnic' groups re-emerged. The seeds of subsequent conflicts were already taking root. Social policy began to be articulated and implemented by a class that assumed that national interests were indistinguishable from its own. Popular involvement in decision-making was deemed unnecessary. Central to the paradigm of modernisation was the casting of 'poverty', rather than rights and freedom, as the main problem facing developing countries. Where poverty was once seen as the product of a denial of basic social and economic rights, it now became 'the problem'.

Social policy in this period was developed centrally and paternalistically. Since the solution to poverty was considered technical, it was to the 'development expert' that the state turned. These came from the North, paid for by and accountable to 'donor' agencies and justified by the lack of 'local capacity'. Social development was to be carried out through

'projects'. The effect was to demobilise popular participation and depoliticise the purpose of social development.

By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of 'development' [was] the principal means through which the question of poverty [was] de-politicized ... At the same time, by making the intentional blue-prints of 'development' so highly visible, a 'development' project can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no-one can object. (Ferguson 1997: 256).

Social policy itself was also increasingly influenced, if not actually determined, by donor agencies. While the state ultimately held the power of approval, projects were determined largely by funds – the granting of which remained in the grace of the donors.

As the state became less accountable to its social base, and as decision-making became more centralised and exercised more despotically, so the influence of representatives of northern governments grew. It was not just their influence that grew, but – in the absence of any challenge – their *legitimacy* to influence and determine social policy in Africa. While that influence may have been exercised gingerly to begin with, all coyness was to be dispensed with in the subsequent era of structural adjustment

4 Social Policy under Structural Adjustment

The economic crisis that emerged out of the oil crisis was characterised by a glut of capital in Europe and America. Although many African countries already had heavy debts, there is little doubt that this surfeit of capital encouraged increases in the debt burden of developing countries (Payer 1989). Although the absolute size of debt of sub-Saharan African countries was relatively small in proportion to the external indebtedness of developing

countries, the size of the debt in relation to the resources and productive capacity of these African countries was large.

The glut was short-lived. The technological revolution in microcomputers and gene technology meant that capital moved to these profitable areas and the 1980s saw significant increases in the cost of borrowing (Sivanandan 1982). Interest rates rose, and debtor countries were suddenly faced with servicing the interest on loans that absorbed ever-greater proportions of export earnings. Debt had become the central issue of concern in development circles.

The Bretton Woods institutions that in the post-war period had invested so heavily to ensure the resuscitation of economies of Europe, became the new commanders of Third World economies. A clutch of social and economic policies that came to be known as structural adjustment programmes were applied, in the spirit of universality, across the board. The social and political impact of these policies was to position the multilateral lending agencies (with the support of the bilateral aid agencies) where they could determine both the goals of development and the means for achieving them. They legitimised direct intervention in political decision-making processes. They determined the extent of state involvement in the social sector, and insisted on draconian economic and social measures that resulted in a rise in unemployment and the decline in real incomes of the majority (Campbell 1989). The result was to transform the social basis of power in African countries, strengthening those forces that would be sympathetic to the continued hegemony of the multilaterals and multinational corporations.

Whereas in the earlier period northern agencies assumed legitimacy for influencing economic policy without too great an interference in social policy, the era of structural adjustment blew away any semblance of separation between economic and social realms. Divisions between those who for political or reasons of patronage received benefits, and those who did not, were exacerbated. The old, discredited theories of 'trickle-down' were embraced as the only legitimate way of enjoying the fruits of development.

Popular dissatisfaction with the policies of the government in the 1980s led to spontaneous demonstrations, burning of crops, wildcat strikes, and

similar expressions of discontent. Universities were closed, demonstrations brutally suppressed, strikes declared illegal. Trade unions, student organisations, popular organisations, and political parties became the target of repressive legislation or actions.

Widespread opposition resulted in some rethinking by official aid agencies and multilaterals about how to present the same economic and social programmes with a more 'human face'.⁶ Funds were allocated to 'mitigating' the 'social dimensions of adjustment'. Such programmes acted as palliatives to minimise the more glaring inequalities that their policies had perpetuated. Funds were made available to ensure that social services for the 'vulnerable' would be provided – but this time not by the state (which had after all been forced to 'retrench') but by the ever willing NGO sector.

The availability of such funds for the NGO sector was to have a profound impact on the very nature of that sector. The pressure on NGOs was to encourage them to become service providers instead of social activists, filling in the space created by the retrenching state. The rationale was that NGOs are supposedly closer to the people, more efficient and more cost effective than the state. The fact that NGOs are in practice no more accountable to the population than private companies provided added leverage for northern agencies to influence social policy. Without alternative or independent sources of income, the NGO sector's vulnerability was exploited to serve the interests of outside agencies who have increasingly been able to define the agenda for social development.

Although during the 1990s there had been an overall reduction in aid from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the proportions directed through NGOs increased substantially (INTRAC 1998). NGOs were perceived as a powerful mechanism by which northern governments could bypass the state not only to exert direct influence on social policy, but also to act as a means of political intervention. At the 1995 Social Summit, for example, the US Vice-President stated that the US Government 'would seek to channel up to 40 per cent of its assistance to poor countries through private aid and charity groups that have

demonstrated greater efficiency than many international organisations including the United Nations'. The political role of USAID was publicly criticised by Nelson Mandela in his address to the nation in December 1997. Citing a report of USAID consultants:

Two thirds of [US]AID's funding ... is used to fund AID-dependent NGOs ... The old 'struggle NGOs' have been redesignated by AID as 'civil service organisations' (or CSOs). AID now funds CSOs to 'monitor public policy, provide information, and advocate policy alternatives' and to serve as 'sentinels, brokers, and arbiters for the public will.' The purpose of AID's funding is to enable these CSOs to 'function as effective policy advocacy groups' and 'to lobby' ... Through its NGOs, AID intends to play a key role in domestic policy concerning the most difficult, controversial issues of national politics. AID's political agenda is ambitious and extensive.

By insisting that the state redirect its investments away from the social sector in favour of the private, the way was laid open for blatant direction of social policy using aid and 'counterpart' funds. The right of the state to define, determine and influence social policy was effectively challenged, creating considerable tensions between the state and NGOs. The fact that those who controlled the state had already lost legitimacy due to despotism and patronage meant that few were in a position to defend this negation of the role of the state.

5 Pluralism, Primitive Accumulation and Conflict

The late 1980s witnessed the re-emergence of the mass movement in South Africa. The South African economy was paralysed, as were its political institutions. All eyes turned south: everyone expected an explosion, a social revolution that would shake the continent. Legitimisation of political opposition and deracialisation of civil society in South Africa was the cry of the international community, the only way to prevent the threat of social upheavals. But if political opposition and the freedoms of civil society were to be legitimised in one part of Africa, why not elsewhere?

Furthermore, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the credibility of alternative ideologies to Thatcherite capitalism also collapsed. Opposition was no longer a function of alternative ideas or policies or about who could enhance development, but now an open and frank fight in the market place for economic hegemony.

In the 1990s, the focus of attention of the international community was on persuading African governments to permit political pluralism in the form of 'multipartyism'. Democratisation of the structures of the state had not occurred, and was certainly no longer in the interest of the ruling elites. The state's role in the social sector had been effectively gelded in the process of structural adjustment, and its decisive role in determining economic policy had been appropriated by the multilateral institutions. What was left that could stave off social upheaval? Pluralism in the political arena seemed the only possibility.

Ten years ago many expected that the situation in Africa would be improved as one-party states gave way to multi-party systems and elected governments. The much vaunted 'African Renaissance' has been associated, instead, with declining economic performance, an externally imposed structural adjustment, backsliding on democratic and other human rights reforms, and increased national and regional tensions. Civil war in the Great Lakes Region has drawn into its vortex countries as far afield as Chad, Namibia and Zimbabwe, as well as countries in the immediate peripheries on the Lakes. Other conflicts have threatened Angola, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Lesotho. Conflicts have led to destabilisation of populations and massive flows of refugees between and within countries, with women and children the most affected.

Despite progress in countries such as South Africa, stagnating economies and growing disparities between rich and poor threaten to destabilise or erode the gains that have been made. Disenchantment and social unrest frequently lead to volatile political environments. Even in South Africa, with the largest economy in Africa, more than 30 per cent of its 40 million people are unemployed, many living in extreme poverty as a legacy of apartheid. The country's economy poses

substantial threats to the sustainability of democratic and social reforms. Elsewhere, as in Zimbabwe, a retreat from democratic and human rights reforms and tolerance for 'civil society' has also been threatened in the face of economic reforms.

The collapse of ideology associated with the collapse of the Berlin Wall led to the legitimisation of ruthless competition that, in the absence of legitimate mechanisms for constraint, was increasingly conducted by the most ruthless means. The distinction between social organisation for criminal activities and for political purposes became blurred. Civilians became increasingly caught in the crossfire as the targets of armed opposition groups or of the increasingly desperate state machinery.

Despite moves towards democratisation in a number of states, fraud, procedural irregularities, harassment of political opponents, torture, prison and other extra-judicial killings remain the means by which control is exerted over the state. While in some cases killings have been committed against a background of civil war, where members of particular communities or 'ethnic groups' are regarded as legitimate targets, in other cases state-supported killings have been presented as outcomes merely of 'ethnic clashes'. Far from legitimising any struggle for basic rights or for greater accountability of the state, the result has been to bring into the public domain the seething divisions between sections of the ruling class competing for control of the state. With their usually rural constituencies, this brought the explosive tensions of tribalism into the urban context.⁷

The material basis for conflicts in Africa had been laid. Popular movements that had once organised around struggles for rights and justice had been demobilised, either through repression, or by redirecting attention to the apparently neutral territory of 'development'. The process of democratisation of the colonial state had been limited to deracialisation of urban civil society, while the rural peasantry remained constricted within the structures of Native Authorities established under colonialism. The development process itself had become a source of accumulation and patronage. Structural adjustment programmes exacerbated social differentiation. As the pie got smaller, so the state became more repressive. Religious and quasi-religious

organisations, sects and other such movements emerged, as they had in the 1920s, as the source of social solidarity. In the urban centres, the only tolerated form of organisation became the network of criminal organisation that rooted themselves in peri-urban ghettos.

The state in contemporary Africa inherited many of the features of its colonial predecessor. The repressive nature of colonial legislation, the judiciary, and the coercive machinery of the state are well documented. Colonial governance was authoritarian and racist. Its strategy was to divide and rule, accompanied by uneven development. At its heart was the creation of a system of 'decentralised despotism,' to use Mamdani's (1996) characterisation: the use of Native Authorities to define and enforce custom with the backing of armed forces, to control, govern and exploit the rural peasantry.

Although state control changed hands at independence, the structures of state machinery were rarely radically transformed. The political programme carried out in most countries was to deracialise the state and the public domain. This opened up new opportunities for the ascendant middle classes to accumulate, creating the basis upon which favour and corruption would flourish, changing urban life and civil society. The ethnically defined Native Authorities, which exercised control and hegemony in the rural areas through unelected chieftainships before independence, were largely left intact.

The deracialisation of urban life without a concurrent detribalisation of rural authority was to become the 'critical dichotomy of post-colonial political economy', and source of major conflicts. For

Without a reform in the local state, the peasantry locked up under the hold of a multiplicity of ethnically defined Native Authorities could not be brought into the mainstream of the historical process. In the absence of democratization, development became a top-down agenda enforced on the peasantry. Without thoroughgoing democratization, there would be no development of the home market. The latter failure opened wide what was a crevice at independence. With every downturn in the international economy, the crevice turned into an opportunity for an externally defined structural

adjustment that combined a narrowly defined program of privatization with a broadly defined program of globalisation. The result was both an internal privatization that recalled the racial imbalance that was civil society in the colonial period and an externally managed capital inflow that towed alongside a phalanx of expatriates – according to the UN estimates, more now than in the colonial period (Mamdani 1996: 288).

The underlying causes of the 1994 Rwandan conflict offer a tragic example of the consequences of externally driven social and economic agenda exacerbating internal contradictions. The collapse of the International Coffee Agreement had a devastating effect on more than 70 per cent of households in the country, and farmers expressed their anger and frustration by cutting down 3,000 coffee trees in 1992. This exacerbated tensions fuelled by the attempted invasion of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF). The government understood that its legitimacy was being challenged. It became more repressive, disseminating hate propaganda against the supposed 'enemy', the Tutsi, and encouraging systematic killings and violations against anyone defined as Tutsi or Tutsi allies. The defence component of the government's already over-stretched budget increased substantially, with the army expanding from 5,000 to over 40,000 soldiers. In this context the World Bank insisted on the implementation of its standard package of social and economic policies – reducing public expenditure, privatisation, retrenchment, and making people pay more for health and education. This increased the burden on the majority of Rwandese, 85 per cent of whom were living below the poverty line. The conflict was triggered within the context of disintegrating political institutions and the political impasse over the proposed power sharing with the RPF when the presidential plane was shot down in April 1994 (Sane and Manji 1997).

If the development process had become about who gets access to what, then civil war is but a more destructive continuation of that process.⁸ Civil war appears to have become the inexorable outcome of the development process itself. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, war has been lucrative for illegal mining, drug trafficking and money laundering. Angola's protracted war has helped Savimbi and some multi-

national corporations to extract diamonds from the country: in 1993 alone, Savimbi's rebel group pocketed \$250 million. De Beers has admitted to buying diamonds illegally mined in Angola worth \$500 million. In 1992 alone, money laundered from drugs in war-torn countries amounted to about \$856 million. The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has become a fight for control over the rich mineral wealth of the country, in which a range of multinational corporations have been implicated (Global Witness 1998).

6 Globalisation and Loss of Self-determination

Structural adjustment effectively dismantled the public sector, bringing in deregulation, privatisation and 'liberalisation'. The preoccupation of international financial institutions and aid agencies with structural adjustment was driven, many believe, by the ideology of the New Right. But its purpose was far-sighted – to restructure the world economy and the underlying social relations of production for the needs of the latest phase of capitalist globalisation, itself the product of revolutions in information communications and gene technology (Sivanandan 1999). Just as the industrial revolution had led to the need to colonise the world, so the new technological revolution has created its own restructured world economy. Although the effects of structural adjustment were to be most devastating in the Third World, structural adjustment has not been confined to the 'peripheries': Thatcherism and Reaganism were domestic articulations of the same process, and the effects of the process in Canada have parallels with those implemented in Africa (Pulkingham and Ternowetsky 1998).

Globalisation has been driven by market expansion, forcing open national borders to trade, capital and information. The principal channels for the transmission of these changes were the Bretton Woods institutions and the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that gave birth to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The trade negotiations at Uruguay extended the concept of trade to new areas including services, trade-related investments and intellectual property rights. These 'multilateral agreements' have been backed by strong enforcement mechanisms that are not only

binding on national governments but drastically reduce their scope for making policy. New agreements such as the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) will enable multinational corporations to dominate the global market even more easily.

It is widely acknowledged that the result has been to increase the gap between rich and poor countries, and between rich and poor within each country. Globalisation has created new threats to personal, economic, cultural and political security. The structures and processes of global policy-making are dominated by key institutions (International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, G-7, G-10, G-22, OECD, WTO) dominated by the governments of advanced capitalist countries. The Third World – and therefore the vast majority of the poor – has little influence. The WTO has come to wield authority over national governments. Multinational corporations are unconstrained by national boundaries, and virtually unaccountable to anyone but their shareholders. There are no mechanisms for 'making ethical standards and human rights binding for corporations and individuals, not just governments' (UNDP 1999).

In the era of globalisation, African states are increasingly losing the authority to determine both the direction and content of social policy. Externally imposed constraints on social policy, tax concessions on profits, price liberalisation, and the dismantling of state-owned enterprises have all contributed to widening inequalities. Faced with the growing dominance of the multinational corporation in the domestic economy, there remain few legitimate ways for the indigenous capitalist class to accumulate. Their choices are limited to becoming agents ('compradors') of the multinationals or crime. As UNDP points out, criminals are 'reaping the benefits of globalisation.' At the root of all of this 'is the growing influence of organized crime, estimated to gross \$1.5 trillion a year, rivalling multinational corporations as an economic power' (UNDP 1999: 5). The impoverishment of Africa, and the devastating reductions in social expenditure, are thus not a function of an absolute lack of wealth, but a consequence of the use to which it has been put.

7 What of the Future?

Are African states becoming caretakers of the peripheral *bantustans* of the 'global village'? Is the role of the state to be the maintenance of the social order in the interests of those minorities who benefit from globalisation? Are we to see a return to the colonial paradigm in which social services for the majority will be delivered on the basis of favour or charity, and then only as a minimum sufficient to serve the needs of the new global order? Are significant health resources to be provided only where epidemics threaten to spread? Is technological innovation to be supported only if it improves the efficiency of the *bantustans*?

There appears to be a logic to the current system that, unless it is interrupted, may well lead to an affirmative response to each of these questions. Important recent developments could yet prevent that process leading to its logical conclusion, and reassert the primacy of justice and human rights. The most important of these has been the resurgence of popular grassroots organisations that have enabled people to organise in defence of their rights against frequently despotic and unaccountable structures of the state (Human Rights Monitoring Group 2000). These formations – reminiscent of the independence movement – perceive rights not as legal rights, and not as charity from above, but as a 'standard-bearer' around which people organise, a means of struggle from below (Shivji 1989).

Much social policy research on Africa today is built on the assumption that the major challenge lies with the development of effective policies in a context of limited funds, and weak institutional and human resource capacities. Adjustment, slow growth, and persistent poverty prompt governments

to re-examine social policies and safety nets. The research challenge identified is to deal with the 'unintended effects' in relation to coverage, equity and efficiency for vulnerable groups (IDRC 1997; WHO 2000), taking for granted the validity of the basic assumptions of the 'Washington Consensus'. But are privatisation, targeting and cost-sharing the only choices for social policy? Have they not been proposed *ad nauseam* by the World Bank and others for two decades, and resulted – without exception – in widening social disparities? For those who, like the Bank, have a vested interest in ensuring that structural adjustment policies are accepted with the minimum of opposition, there is clearly an interest in undertaking research to ensure that any 'unintended effects' are minimised.⁹ But as the recent UNDP report puts it:

Competitive markets may be the best guarantee of efficiency, but not necessarily of equity. Liberalization and privatization can be a step to competitive markets – but not a guarantee of them. And markets are neither the first nor the last word in human development. Many activities and goods that are critical to human development are provided outside the market – but these are being squeezed by the pressures on public goods, a time squeeze on the environment ... When the market goes too far in dominating social and political outcomes, the opportunities and rewards of globalisation spread unequally and inequitably – concentrating power and wealth in a select group of people, nations and corporations, marginalizing the others. ... When the profit motives of market players get out of hand, they challenge people's ethics – and sacrifice respect for justice and human rights. (UNDP 1999: 2)

Notes

1. This also broadly defines the conditions in South Africa under apartheid, and increasingly those in Africa in the era of globalisation.
2. See, for example, World Bank (1989). This view has been brilliantly challenged by Amartya Sen (1999) who demonstrates that dramatic improvements in life expectancy and reductions in child mortality rates are an outcome of state interventions in the social sector rather than of increases in GNP.
3. In South Africa, similar forms of organisation were

seen during the same period until the movement was brutally crushed, only to re-emerge in other forms in the late 1970s. The processes that took place in South Africa in the lead up to the first elections and the gradual transformation of the struggle for rights into the realm of 'development' has uncanny similarities to what happened in the rest of the continent.

4. The parallels between this enthusiasm for social investment by the state in the immediate post-

independence period and in the period immediately after the downfall of apartheid seems to suggest that the advanced capitalist countries are motivated by political considerations as much as commitment to economic dogma.

5. Cowen and Shenton (1996) provide a lucid analysis of the origin of the term 'development', tracing its roots to the present day orthodoxy where trusteeship (and paternalism) continue to be at its heart.
6. Cornia *et al.* (1987). There is a wonderful irony in the fact that as globalisation has been found to have even more devastating effects, calls are being made for 'Globalisation with a Human Face' (see UNDP 1999).

7. See, for example: Amnesty International (1998); Ennals (1992); National Council of Churches of Kenya (1992).
8. Mamdani goes further. He characterises tribalism as 'civil war' because the 'notion of civil war is a continuum along which muted tensions coexist long before they break out into open confrontation' (1996: 292).
9. I will avoid entering a debate about whether such effects are intended or not: that would miss the more important issue that the effects are an *inevitable* consequence of the policies – and there is today empirical evidence to support this view from virtually every African country.

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