

# **Social Development and Urban Poverty**

**Proceedings of a Workshop  
Held at the Kentucky Hotel,  
Harare, Zimbabwe**

**22 – 26 February, 1993**

**School of Social Work,  
Zimbabwe**

# **Social Development and Urban Poverty**

**Paper presentations and edited proceedings of a  
Workshop held in Harare, Zimbabwe  
22nd – 26th February, 1993**

**edited by Nigel Hall**

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## **Aims and Focus of Workshop**

### **Workshop on Social Development and Urban Poverty**

Dates: February 22 – 26, 1993

Venue: Kentucky Airport Hotel, Harare, Zimbabwe

Contact: Editor, Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work, P Bag 66022, Kopje, Zimbabwe, Tel: 750815.

Sponsors: Overseas Development Administration (British Development Division Central Africa)

Organisers: Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work

Participants: To be drawn from Southern African countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Also participants from University College, Swansea.

#### **Aims of the Workshop:**

- a) To discuss issues of social development with specific reference to urban poverty.
- b) To facilitate an exchange of experiences on problems of poverty in southern Africa.
- c) To examine the social consequences of structural adjustment programmes, especially as they relate to urban poverty.
- d) To discuss the implications of urban poverty for social work education and practice, in particular, fieldwork.

#### **Focus of the Workshop:**

- The Workshop will focus on the problem of urban poverty, looking at issues such as definition of problems, intervention strategies, social policy, the way forward, analysis of students' experiences while on fieldwork, etc.
- Country structural adjustment and economic reform programmes will be reviewed.
- The Workshop will also address the issue of popular participation and accountability, with the objective of making central and local governments more accountable than they are.
- Specific services such as housing, health, community services, personal social services, social security, research, etc, will be evaluated in their relation to urban poverty.
- Fieldwork, with its implications for social work education and practice, will be examined.

#### **Papers will be two-pronged:**

- a) Focus on country with discussion of urban poverty, extent of problem, intervention strategies, etc.
- b) Focus on fieldwork regarding its role in training social workers and urban development; and social development training with special reference to fieldwork.

## “The Personal is Political: International Politics, National Politics and Community Participation”

Maureen Sibbons \*

The multiple themes of the Workshop are focused on the problems of urban poverty. Structural adjustment and economic reform programmes, their relationship to poverty and effects on specific welfare services are to be addressed, as is the subject of popular participation and accountability. In other words (and to explain the title) the impoverishment of the individual is an effect of international and national politics and policies, but suggestions for relief of poverty also come from international agencies and government departments, often permeated with the language of the development of sustainable, self-reliant processes of self and community improvement through community participation – that is, the personal is political.

Community participation is a dominant rhetoric. In the health sector since 1978 and the Alma Ata declaration, community involvement in health has been a central tenet of primary health care programmes. Later in this presentation I will briefly examine some examples from the health sector. But to start I wish to address the issue of the relationship of community participation and structural adjustment.

### ***To put it into historical context:***

*“The development debate and the concerns of many donors were dominated during the 1970s by two five letter words – ‘basic needs’; during the ‘80s by two ten letter words – ‘structural adjustment’; and as we entered the ‘90s by two eleven letter words ‘sustainable development’”* (Please, 1992).

Sustainable development, according through to the World Bank and other donor agencies, is only possible if the communities are involved, ie through popular participation. A similar theme emerges from the British ODA – aid is prioritised where good governance, sustainable development and protection of the environment are evident in country programmes. ‘Good governance’ is, in their terms, multiparty, parliamentary, democracy with universal franchise, which emphasises the ability of the individual to participate fully in the democratic processes. Participation, therefore, is a general theme threaded through bilateral and multilateral aid programmes.

Why has this change of rhetoric appeared in the ‘90s? If I briefly generalise the effects of SAPs, I hope to show that the new rhetoric is a direct result of past experiences.

Documentary evidence suggests that IMF stabilisation policies and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes in African countries have a negative effect on the poorest. The IMF emphasis is on what they perceive to be the need to reduce wasteful and inefficient government spending and to remove internal constraints and distortions to the functioning of markets. This emphasis has short-term results which increase unemployment, remove or reduce safety nets for vulnerable groups, increase food prices (food is always a higher percentage of spending in the poorest families) and decrease availability of (previously government-provided) welfare services (Cornia, et al, 1987). These negative effects are often felt most by women as the inherent male bias (Elson, 1989) of macro-economic policies result in failure to address such issues as:

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- 1) who provides welfare services (in the formal sector: women as nurses and teachers for example, facing retrenchment during government spending cutbacks; informally: women as wives and mothers who have an increased burden of providing unpaid welfare to their families as government services are curtailed or are priced beyond reach)
- 2) what gender effects there are on school attendance from reduced family income (unemployment, falling real wages, increased food costs) and cost-recovery introduction (in Zimbabwe the evidence so far seems to suggest a possible reduction in primary school attendance by girls, and certainly a greater fall in secondary school attendance of girls rather than boys), and
- 3) in the rural areas, what the time budget implications are for women farmers and women-headed households from mechanisms to encourage increased crop production for the market rather than consumption.

These are some of the suggested direct effects of SAPs that I hope will be examined in the series of Workshop discussions. A caveat must be entered though – it is very difficult to determine categorically which result is due to the implementation of SAPs and which are due to the underlying inherent economic problems that the SAPs are trying to address, or indeed to the lack of full implementation of the recommended economic remedies. The dramatic and devastating effects of drought in southern Africa have also muddied the waters of analysis – for example, lack of rain meant reduced milk yields and hence it would be expected, higher prices for milk and dairy produce. Is the increased malnutrition contributed to by the reduced consumption of milk a result of SAP-induced removal of food subsidies or the result of drought? Quite probably a combination – but can it be proved?

What is undoubtedly true is that UNICEF were sufficiently concerned with the poverty effects of SAPs that they published a two-volume book highlighting these concerns and suggesting ways forward to prevent a further worsening of the SAP-induced effects (Cornia, et al, 1987). Two points of relevance to this paper emerge from the book:

- 1) Neglect of the poor and the vulnerable which occurs from the introduction of SAPs results not only in a decline in welfare but also has negative effects on the potential for growth of economies:

*“the health, nutrition and education of a nation’s children is one of the most important determinants of its economic potential, so protecting the vulnerable is also essential for promoting growth in the short as well as the medium and long-term”* (Cornia, et al, 1987).

That is to say the message from the book is not one of pure altruism or concern for the poor and vulnerable, but for the negative effects on growth. Is this a message protecting the interests of the poor or of the capitalist?

- 2) Community participation is an essential ingredient in the alternative approach that they suggest to protect the poor against the effects of SAPs.

I would suggest that these two messages have been important for the change in emphasis of the World

Bank. Not only does this emerge in changes to SAPs, but also reading their more recent annual development reports where sustainable development and community participation have been interwoven with continuing messages of reducing government spending and efficient use of scarce resources.

The experiences of the countries represented at this meeting and how closely or otherwise these are to the generalisations outlined have important implications for the other issues that are to be discussed, namely popular participation and accountability, the specific effects on urban social services, and social work practice and education. I now wish to return to one of these issues – popular participation and accountability, and to use examples of past experiences in the health sector. I hope it will become clear during this part of the paper why the issue of participation is important to the whole discussion of urban poverty alleviation, highlighting as it does debates about: a) the state or government as agents of social control; b) empowerment or pragmatism, that is participation as a means or an end; and c) definitions of community and representative democracy.

Community development, with community participation, is not a new concept, despite the apparent new emphasis. Mayo (1975) describes the Indian community development programme of the British government in 1947, a programme continued by the Congress Party after '48, as part of the political agenda of the British government: "*The whole project was quite explicitly an attempt to create plausibly democratic institutions without serious dislocation of the vested interests of the status quo*" (p131). She describes urban poverty alleviation programmes as "community psychotherapy", not an attack on the real structural problems. She considers community participation to be a non-radical, reactionary and repressive practice:

*"as a relatively cheap and typically ideological attempt to resolve various economic, social and political problems. It has clearly been attractive to governments and voluntary agencies both national and international for use not just in the Third World but also among racial minorities and indigenous poor at home"*.

In other words she concludes it is essentially a patronising and conservative rhetoric. This is reiterated by Morgan (1990) in a paper which looks at community participation in Costa Rica's health programme:

*"... participation was a concept introduced by the United States and promoted by foreign aid agencies to promote a Western democratic political ideology. Once the ideological function had been served, and the contradictions of state-sponsored community participation had been revealed, the concept was abandoned by the agencies and the Costa Rican Government"*.

Popular participation as a donor agency rhetoric, therefore, comes and goes. If there is a perceived need to control potential community-based initiatives which might threaten the institutions of the state, co-opting these into a structure designed by international agencies or government is a means of apparently supporting local communities, but in reality controlling local initiatives – bringing them into line with a dominant ideology. At other times dependency-creating delivery of services is the emphasis; in the health sector this is seen with the reintroduction of selective primary health care (PHC) – a vertical programme of epidemiologically determined initiatives, with control in the hands of the medical elite and health planners (often one and the same). PHC with its calls for community participation is said to be too expensive; but is this the case, or is this another example of control of local initiatives?

To reinforce the changing nature of attitudes towards community development, I cite the following example. At the 1948 Cambridge summer conference on African Administration, the participants defined community development as:

*“A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation, and, if possible, on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement” (UNICEF-WHO, 1977).*

Isn't this manipulation of communities to fulfil a Western ideological need rather contradictory to the whole concept of community development? The dominant discourse of the World Bank, IMF, UNICEF, WHO and bilateral donors lead one to the conclusion that participation fits one definition of participation which is that it is a means of achieving the goals of development as determined by the dominant agencies (and states) through the encouragement of local people to be involved in projects by disseminating information and knowledge; this contrasts with the alternative definition as local participation in the production of knowledge which can lead to informed development which involves people as active participants rather than passive recipients.

The evidence of the last 15 years of Primary Health Care, aiming towards Health for All by the Year 2000, is not very encouraging for the practical application of the latter definition. As Mull and Mull (1991) say:

*“Despite their lip-service to the ideals informing “health for all”, programme planners usually do not really want to empower the community. Such empowerment takes too long and has the potential to threaten the status quo. Although planners may be persuaded to foster community participation on the grounds that it will help their programmes have more impact, such actions do not really stem from a commitment to sharing power with the people. They reflect a desire for expedience and rapid results rather than a true understanding of what community empowerment entails”.*

Where does this leave us in this Workshop? SAPs are increasing the need for social workers in increasingly impoverished and under-resourced neighbourhoods. At the same time retrenchment of government employees reduces the number of such workers available to deal with the increased workload. Is community participation going to be a rhetoric of control and a means of, or excuse for, low-cost, poorly-resourced social services, or a means of empowerment? The inherent contradictions in a policy, which on the one hand encourages competition and the “free market” and on the other encourages cooperation and participation, is difficult to reconcile and leaves debates of the changing roles of social workers in this context problematic. To truly overcome structural problems do we need an alternative approach – an approach which is not new but largely unpracticed, namely: participation as a means of enabling the vulnerable individual in the impoverished community to become as politically powerful, to have voice and agency, as those who control the resources that could improve those environments and that individual's life? And in practical terms what does this mean?

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