

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.

Poverty Among Children in Lesotho: The Need for Social Services

Limakasto Chisepo *

Introduction

Lesotho is an independent monarchical country, whose being surrounded by the Republic of South Africa makes it quite unique. Even its problems are peculiar. It is a small country covering an area of 30,355 sq km and has a population of 1,8 million. The country is divided into ten administrative districts. At village level there is a traditional structure in which chiefs are responsible for the day-to-day administration. About 75% of Lesotho is mountainous. *Thabana-Ntlenyana*, which is the highest mountain in Lesotho, is also the highest in southern Africa and is 3,841m. The high altitude makes the country one of the very few countries in Africa that experience severe winters with heavy snow-falls, particularly in the mountainous regions.

Because of the rugged terrain, only 13% of the land is arable. Settlement patterns have been determined by the mountains, deep valleys, streams and rivers. Lack of infrastructure – roads, bridges and transport – makes communication difficult, at times impossible. Lesotho's geographic position renders its economy highly dependant on South Africa. About 40% of Lesotho's male labour force (30% of the total labour force) work in the South African mines. Thirty percent of Lesotho's GNP is generated by migrant workers. However, there is currently a sharp decline in migrant labour contracts.

The following are Lesotho's main socio-economic characteristics:

- the per capita Gross Domestic Product is M410 and the per capita Gross National Product is M723
- 60% of rural households are headed by women as men are working in South African mines
- 52% of school age children do not attend school, either because parents cannot afford school fees or, if they are boys, because they herd animals
- the annual population growth rate is 2,63%
- over 50% of the population is under 15 years of age
- the under-five mortality rate is 132 per 1,000 live births
- the infant mortality rate is 97 per 1,000 live births

(Bernard van Leer Foundation, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, 1991).

Definition of Problems

Lesotho has for a very long time cherished its culture in that traditionally children were seen as assets to families, communities and the nation, while their welfare was seen as the responsibility of not only the family, but of the community as a whole.

Because different families and communities have similar goals and aspirations for young children, they were able to reinforce and support each other in child-rearing. But with modern economies, the traditional extended family system is gradually dying, while the nuclear family system is the current trend. This trend towards 'everyone for oneself' is aggravated by the high cost of education to start

* Department of Social Welfare, Maseru, Lesotho

with, migration from rural into urban areas and finally the prevailing poverty surrounding the majority of the Basotho. These factors are considered in more detail:

a) Poverty

Poverty in Lesotho is defined according to lack of the following basic necessities (Ministry of Planning, 1991):

- an adequate food supply
- clear and abundant drinking water
- good roads and transport
- money with which to buy consumer goods
- wage employment
- convenient and well-supplied medical facilities
- clean and convenient sanitation and toilets
- household furnishings and clothing
- fuel and firewood
- secure and warm housing
- relevant and inexpensive schooling.

When considering all these indicators, the majority of the people in Lesotho are without these necessities.

b) Education

A good percentage of children in Lesotho miss school opportunities because parents cannot afford the high cost of education. Education is a social necessity in life. It inculcates the person being educated into the normal social norms and etiquette, and prepares the person to fit in and serve the society better. In Lesotho there is still a tendency for boys to be brought up as herdboys. They grow up in the cattle posts in the mountains until such time when they are old enough to go and seek employment in the urban areas of the country, or out of the country in South African mines. So far these have been the only places where people who have never been to school can secure some form of employment. Most of the occupations in the higher echelons have to be preceded by a certain amount of formal education. But unfortunately the Lesotho Government's spending in education has up to now been on tertiary education where a few people benefit, while basic education is becoming more and more expensive each year.

As already mentioned, not many parents can afford to pay for their children's education, which is considered the parents' responsibility.

c) Urbanisation

As already stated, only 13% of the country's land is arable and therefore it becomes very difficult for a rural dweller to survive on agriculture alone. All along agriculture was supplemented by the migrant workers' remittances from South African mines. But recently there has been a high rate of retrenchment of the miners and this results in life becoming very difficult for rural populations. With life becoming harder in the rural areas than in towns, Lesotho is now experiencing a high rate of urbanisation.

Over the past few years the population distribution between rural and urban areas has altered very significantly. Of the 330,000 households in Lesotho, 270,000 are rural and 52,000 urban. But urban growth increased from 7% to 15% in the last decade, at an annual growth of 5,5%. The capital town (Maseru) has a population growth of approximately 7% per annum. Maseru's population doubled

from 55,031 in 1979 to 109,382 in 1986. It is estimated that by 1996, Maseru will have about 210,000 inhabitants. Despite the assumption that town life has advantages over rural life, many urban households continue to fall below the urban poverty threshold of M160 per month (ie US\$8).

This phenomenon of urbanisation has deeply affected the towns and growth areas, with particular reference to Maseru, the capital town of Lesotho. Urbanisation has become a chronic problem. This settlement in towns has led to widespread subsistence-level self-employment for some people and complete unemployment to many of the urban dwellers. A majority of the rural dwellers had migrated into towns with hopes of getting employment, but failure to meet this need leads to a number of other social problems such as:

- squatter settlements
- street children
- baby abandonment, and
- high rates of crime, to mention just a few.

Due to the factors mentioned above, eg government's support for tertiary level education, parents' inability to pay for children's fees, increasing urbanisation and significant changes in family structure, children are being adversely affected and the quality of their lives compromised. Hence many children have to loiter in the streets or are forced by circumstances to be engaged in child labour.

Child labour, however, is found entirely in the informal sector. If not employed, a good number of children resort to crime in order to survive in the harsh conditions of urban life. The extent of juvenile crime is not accurately known. However the police and prisons statistics show theft and rape as leading crimes committed. Table 1 below outlines juvenile offences for the period January to December 1991.

**Table 1 – OFFENCES BY JUVENILES IN LESOTHO
JANUARY TO DECEMBER 1991**

OFFENCE	BOYS	GIRLS
MURDER	95	2
RAPE	114	-
INFANTICIDE	-	7
STOCK THEFT	40	-
ROBBERY	61	1
HOUSE BREAKING & THEFT	252	54
DRUGS	19	1
TOTAL	581	65

This table demonstrates how out of dire need the urban youth are inclined to housebreaking and theft.

The majority of children are in need of care in towns. For instance, according to a report by Simms (1985), in 1985 alone, police statistics reported that the Juvenile Delinquency squad dealt with 38 children in need of some form of help in Maseru during a period of ten months. Of these 38 children, 15 were loitering, 12 were lost, six were abandoned babies, four were glue sniffers and one baby had been killed by its mother.

In another study by Poulter, as cited in UNICEF, 1991, statistics for infanticide were reported as 66 cases between 1973 and 1977. All these problems are a reflection of parents' inability to cope with the exigencies of urban life.

A number of children are forced into menial, often exploitative situations as a means of family survival.

d) Poverty and Child Labour

A significant proportion of the children aged 15 or younger who have joined the ranks of the labour force come from poor or needy families. Poor families in the urban area are of various categories. Prominent amongst them are those who have recently migrated to the urban areas from the rural areas. For them, the attraction of the seemingly promising town life, with prospects for employment, education, medical services and other amenities, often turns into the opposite.

Usually upon arriving in the towns, they often join the unemployed in the least-paying jobs. They mostly live in the slum areas of the towns where there are no services. Other children who join the labour force are the neglected ones. These come mostly from broken families. They are usually brought up by single parents. Another group of child labourers are the delinquents. These are children who have simply run away from home and chosen to seek adventure in the streets.

Children who work are to be found in the informal sector of Lesotho. They work for remuneration either in cash or are paid in kind. The jobs that they do include domestic work and other household-related activities, and odd jobs in and around the formal sector such as commercial shops and supermarkets. Child labour is also practised in the context of the extended family, whereby young girls from poor families are “borrowed out” to affluent relatives in town where they can “help” with most of the household work. The age of these girls who basically do most of the domestic work start as early as 14 years, and these children are often exploited to the maximum, as their wages can be as low as M40 per month.

e) The Problem of Street Children

Urban poverty and the forms of child labour described above often strengthen the problem of “street children”. Children become exposed to the survival strategies of street life and of life without the protection and support of parents at an early age. As a result a child is exposed to the influence of street gangs at an age when peer group pressure is at its most powerful. Predominantly street children in Lesotho come from poor families, the parents of which are often too preoccupied about making ends meet to take sufficient interest in the day-to-day affairs of their children. These are children who come, for example, from families that depend on brewing and selling beer for their livelihood. UNICEF (1991) makes reference to Malahleha’s study which points out that some of these children come from broken families, particularly the female-headed households, and of unmarried mothers. The street children are prone to committing crimes. The common juvenile crimes on records have been found to be:

- rape
- assault
- concealment of birth
- theft
- drugs
- house-breaking.

Intervention Strategies

(i) Probation Services

For a very long time there have not been sufficient safeguards for young people who have committed crimes in Lesotho. It was in 1980 when the Children’s Protection Act came into effect as a piece of

legislation to cater for children's needs. The Children's Protection Act provides for the setting up of children's courts, but in practice juvenile cases are heard in the ordinary courts. The Act also has provisions against the imprisonment of children, but almost all the children who go to the Juvenile Training Centre are convicted criminals, and therefore kept under prison conditions.

Although Probation Orders are an option for juvenile offenders, magistrates seldom use them, and the Probation Service/Unit is not yet adequately staffed. Juveniles are supposed to serve a maximum of three years detention. But some of them receive heavy sentences of up to ten years, due to the 1988 introduction of the state of emergency against crime.

According to the Revision of Penalties Order of 1988, the minimum sentence which may be imposed on a person who has been convicted for stock theft, assault, housebreaking with intent to steal, theft or rape is five years imprisonment without an option of a fine. Most of these offences, according to police records, are commonly committed by children.

ii) The Structural Adjustment Programme

The problems of children are bound to grow as we are in the era when many governments have been forced to cut social services as part of economic policies. When realising the prevailing poverty and the unfortunate situation of inadequacy in the provision of services, in 1988 Lesotho undertook the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

This has been successful in terms of bringing down government expenditure, but has led to some diminution in services. When comparing the pre-SAP period with the SAP period, it appears that expenditure in personal services has fallen more rapidly during the SAP. This is so because the tighter controls restrict what is deemed unnecessary in government expenditure. The SAP has set strict limits on the rate of growth of the wage bill. This reduction in wage bill reflects both strict limits in employment and real wage cuts.

Salaries and personal emoluments have fallen more rapidly during the SAP period in real terms than before. The freeze in wages and erosion of salaries due to high inflation rates make it increasingly difficult to maintain skilled workers in key positions. In Lesotho very close neighbourliness with South Africa, and the comparatively high wages in that country have attracted many Basotho. This results in poorer services, especially those for children.

The SAP, therefore, has not helped in the alleviation of poverty as such in Lesotho. For instance the Social Welfare Department has only eight established posts for social workers who are expected to serve the whole nation; while the Probation Unit has five professionals.

(iii) Institutional Care

In trying to alleviate the above-mentioned problems of children, institutional care has been resorted to. The existing institutions in the country comprise of vocational centres, orphanages, half-way homes and community care programmes of family support to the destitute in their own home environments. There has been establishment of skills training centres in the country, whose objective is to equip the youth, especially the primary school drop-outs, with practical, marketable skills they require to become productive and self-sufficient citizens.

Examples of such schemes are:

- Thabana-Morena Skills Centre
- Tholoan'a Lerato Training Centre
- Thaba-Khupa Vocational School
- Itjareng Vocational Rehabilitation Centre (for disabled)
- Ithuseng Vocational Rehabilitation Centre (for disabled)

According to figures given by Ralitapole (1993), there are 15,000 - 20,000 school leavers seeking employment every year; and the formal sector absorptivity capacity does not afford to have all these job - seekers employed. It is hoped that since youth represent the majority of Lesotho's population, efforts to engage youth in participating in development activities after acquisition of skills at the above-mentioned centres will help reduce the ever increasing urban poverty and its associated social ills.

Conclusion

It is now deemed worth consideration that those systems which have evolved over the centuries and are essential to the well being of the Basotho nation, but have been destroyed by urbanisation, be reviewed. One such system is the extended family, while the other is the Probation Service.

Lesotho used to have an admirable history of relatively equal distribution of wealth and extended family and community care systems. This is why a programme of family support to the destitute in their own home environments is what is being emphasised now. Fostering and adoption are amongst the social welfare services that need to be strengthened. It is in the Government of Lesotho's plan that the Adoption and Fostering system be augmented in order to encourage willing, but needy relatives to foster or adopt children in need of care. Presently an adoptive or fostering parent does not get any financial assistance from the government as expected. With the grants-in-aid of any child in need of care being put into practice it is hoped that looking after children in need might be put into practice by the majority of willing relatives who are hampered by the limited resources. Having realised the high rate of juvenile crimes, measures have been taken by the Probation Unit of the Ministry of Justice to strengthen community services among juvenile offenders. The probation service is committed to developing community-based supervision for the young offenders. It has also been considered necessary to develop some facilities for juveniles on remand, other than to incarcerate them in the so called Juvenile Training Centre, which is practically a prison.

The Department of Social Welfare and the Probation Unit are currently in the process of revising the existing Children's Protection Act in order to create adequate welfare of children and realistic community alternatives to custody. In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which Lesotho has ratified, the Probation Service is planning to develop constructive sentences to assist in the rehabilitation of young offenders, as the removal of a young offender from his or her home environment does have destructive and negative consequences, the result of which is the prevailing poverty among children in Lesotho.

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