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BLACK NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS
FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SOME INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

L. Schlemmer

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Centre for Applied Social Sciences
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BLACK NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS
FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SOME INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

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South Africa's greatest challenge in the nineteen eighties lies in the need to respond creatively to the rapidly rising needs and aspirations of black people. There are many impediments to a creative response, particularly in a society in which a "colonial" tradition of administration of black affairs is so deeply rooted. The well known ex-South African British sociologist John Rex has expressed this very clearly when he referred to the government of black South Africans as being an extention of the principle of the "native compound".

Fortunately this principle is being modified in policy-thinking to some extent. This is perhaps most clearly evidenced by the tabling of the Black Local Authorities Bill in parliament, providing for local government on the same basis as that existing for other groups.

Nevertheless, if this challenge is to be addressed, two major requirements have to be met. Firstly, black people have to participate in the formulation of policies for their socio-economic development, and secondly, there has to be greater precision in regard to what the needs and aspirations of black people are.

My task is to talk about the latter issue, although I will say something about the former at the end of my analyses. The following summary of findings on black needs and aspirations is based on various field surveys and community studies, including research conducted for the Quail Commission on the future of the Ciskei and the Buthelezi Commission on KwaZulu-Natal. Very little in the findings is new or surprising but the significance of the summary which follows is perhaps simply that the findings have been consistently proven in repeated enquiries.

I. GENERAL NEED AND ASPIRATIONS

In very general terms, black perceptions of development are very strongly influenced by basic needs. Black people generally do not have the luxury of being able to elaborate their needs in more subtle or more expansive directions as middle class people do. Hence recreational needs, needs for diversion and entertainment and aesthetic

needs do not figure prominently in the spectrum of wants revealed by blacks in research.

Black perceptions of their wants tend to be concentrated around income, security food, shelter, and among the very poor - sheer survival in terms of health and nutrition.

Research conducted on "quality of life in Durban" by Dr. Valerie Møller and myself illustrated this well. It also demonstrated the tremendous gap in the extent to which the needs of different groups are being met in a large city. [1]   Table 1 is an extract from our analysis.

On the basis of the study quoted above as well as a fairly large variety of other research projects, enquiries and contact with communities, we have arrived at what we see as the most meaningful felt needs in black urban areas. We include some of the felt needs which are rarely expressed, but which exert a powerful hidden influence on degree of overall life contentment.

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1)   V. Møller and L. Schlemmer, *Quality of Life in South Africa Towards an Instrument for the Assessment of Quality of Life and Basic Needs*, Revised version of paper presented at the WORKSHOP for QUALITY OF LIFE AND BASIC NEEDS held at the Conference Centre of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Pretoria, 17th November, 1981.

Table 1.

'FELT PRIVATIONS' AMONG DIFFERENT GROUPS IN DURBAN

Most seriously felt needs in descending order:

Whites:		Indians:		Blacks:	
	index*		index*		index*
issues of	of felt	issues of	of felt	issues of	of felt
concern	privation	concern	privation	concern	privation
food prices	1,5	housing supply	4,0	food prices	8,1
racial peace	1,4	S. African vote	3,3	better house	5,3
housing supply	1,1	food prices	2,2	housing supply	4,2
		racial inequality	1,6	wealth	3,5
		parks	1,6	better roads	2,6
		police protection	1,3	dwelling space	2,0
		own education	1,2	rentals	2,0
		financial		solidly built	
		security (family)	1,0	house	1,8
		well paid job	1,0	privacy in the	
				home	1,7
				racial inequality	1,4
				well paid job	1,4
				residential	
				security	1,2
				urban owner-	
				builder	1,2
				plentiful good	
				food	1,2
				educational	
				facilities	1,2
				own education	1,2
				family health	1,1
				financial	
				security (family)	1,1
				transport costs	1,0
				provision for	
				children	1,0
				fair wages	1,0
				education for	
				children	1,0

Rough total (accumulated) index of felt deprivation		
Blacks	=	46
Indians	=	17
Whites	=	4

* The index of 'felt privation' was computed by dividing the percentage in each group adjudging a need to be among the 30-40 most important by the percentage expressing satisfaction with the issue.   A minimum index of 1,0 was taken as a cut-off.

Schedule I

Priority needs in black urban areas

- wage and income improvements;

- more widespread services which will increase the predictability of social
  and economic advancement (e.g. availability of bursaries, high-quality
  part-time university, technical and vocational training, loan and
  credit facilities more freely available for self-improvement or home-
  improvement projects, etc.);

- reform in the legal system, in the administration of justice and in
  local laws and regulations to remove the impression of arbitrariness.
  Reform in Influx Control laws is a particular priority;

- related to the above is the need to encourage a less "colonial" approach
  to township administration. Our township administration is marked
  by an extension of the tradition of the compound. There are simply
  too many ways in which the average resident is reminded daily that his
  community and housing affairs are controlled and regulated;

- constitutional reform to give black communities meaningful participation
  in the political process and the opportunity to elect leaders with at
  least the visible power to negotiate on legislation potentially
  detrimental to black community interests;

- more determined programmes aimed at black job-advancement, job opportunity
  and equality of opportunity in all sectors;

- improved availability of housing;

- larger houses (or opportunities for home enlargement);

- durability of housing;

- greater privacy inside homes (relates in part to need for larger homes);

- health insurance and improved health facilities;

- improved old age security and insurance;

- improved roads, street lighting, etc.;

- more schools;

- choice in schooling for children;

- reduced educational expenses;

- police protection and the combatting of crime in the townships;

- job security and protection from arbitrary dismissal;

- respect for dignity at work and in public;

- community development in urban areas to improve quality and variety of
  recreation, to enrich opportunities for social interaction, to
  widen scope for expressions of lifestyle and social interests and
  to increase levels of community trust.

Needless to say, the list is one which is forbidding in the number of areas requiring to be addressed. Obviously in any meaningful programme of action, priorities on such a list would have to be set. These priorities can only be set by or with the people themselves, hence the need for participation in decision-making.

2. <u>EDUCATION</u>

Education figures very prominently in the schedule. Because of this, and of the power of education to enable other goals to be achieved, it merits separate discussion.

Education of good quality, although one of the internationally-recognised basic needs, figures more prominently in South African black aspirations than one would find among poor or working class people who are not African. The need for educational reform and improved educational opportunity among both rural and urban people is so strongly perceived that it virtually appears like a popular obsession in research findings.

The reasons for this are complex. Firstly, as the de Lange enquiry has recently shown once again, it is an objective perception. Black education is of such poor quality that parents and school children are constantly reminded of the problem. Secondly, education is generally seen to be the essential feature which creates the sharp distinctions between black and white and all the attendant problems. This perception goes back to the persistent message of the missionaries in the previous century who created the impression that Christianity, education and "civilised ways" were the essential preconditions for acceptance into the world of western values. Today many whites use the educational disadvantage of blacks as a way of euphemistically defending racial discrimination, thus reinforcing the perception of the value of education.

We have found, for example, that between 6 and 7 out of 10 working class black parents seriously desire their children to become university-trained professionals. This is much higher than the

level of educational aspirations among equivalent whites or coloured people.

This pattern amounts to what one can possibly regard as an over-emphasis on education. It is a great problem since educational failure relative to aspirations is widespread and chronic, and even the reforms suggested by the de Lange enquiry will not remove most of the problem. The accumulating sense of failure leads to either bitterness, a high degree of personal stress among young blacks, or to apathy and demoralisation.

Determined and vigorous educational reform is required but employers must contribute to normalising the situation by making as much provision as they possibly can for in-service training and promotion schemes for less well-educated blacks. Black people have to gain or regain the notion that effort, hard work and acquired skill and experience can provide career and development opportunities in themselves.

There are, however, additional considerations in regard to education which are of vital significance to the future of our society. As it is presently structured, education has a complex relationship to black political consciousness, probably generating both apathy and defeat because of high drop-out rates and high expectations which are frustrated in work-seeking because of the poor quality of Matric in the black system. As essential and unavoidable reform proceeds, the former effect will be minimised and the latter augmented. Black education, particularly African education, is becoming a more and more seriously destabilising factor in South Africa. At the very least one may argue that educational reform will not reduce conflict in South Africa's divided society.

If black senior pupils could be exposed to exactly the same educational experience as whites, in both its formal and informal aspects, the very serious problem of frustration and disadvantage at higher level can be minimised. This must imply integrated schools, although it does not necessarily imply that all white schools should have enforced integration.

Given the shortage of teaching and resources, equal standards simply cannot be maintained with segregated systems.

The experience at the few private white schools which have taken black pupils, and that of a truly non-racial school like Woodmead, bear out the probabilities of educational and social success of school integration at this level, (although obviously some specific problems remain and prior bridging courses for Africans entering an integrated system may be necessary).

What this author has in view is the necessity of establishing in each region a number of large integrated high schools (by building new schools or adapting certain existing schools). No group will have to send their children to such schools — the system should be optional. However, the schools should be established as high-quality institutions by the various education authorities on a combined basis, with sound equipment and well-qualified teachers of any race.

Unfortunately at this stage proposals like these are seen by the authorities as radical. However, the likely effects of not moving in this direction are much more *"radical"*.

International experience shows conclusively that segregated educational systems function well if, and only if the various population groups desire separated education, if the facilities are truly equal across groups, and if the administration of the system is decentralised right down to community level. None of these features apply to South Africa's divided education and none are feasible, precisely because of the problems which segregated education has created.

To continue along present lines in South African education is hazardous and wasteful. To say the very least, South African educational reform as it is occurring at the moment is likely to be cost-ineffective, inflationary and radicalising in its effects.

3. POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS

Poor people who are concerned with basic needs are not normally
political in their outlook.   The general pattern throughout the world is
for poor people to have immediate concerns and politics is too abstract
for them most of the time.

Among black people in South Africa, however, there is such very
direct and transparent interference in their lives that rank and file
blacks have acquired a political awareness and political concerns which
far exceed those of working and lower middle-class whites, who tend
to vote (some would say unintelligently) once every five years and forget
about politics in between.   In response to all sorts of questions, even
illiterate black people reflect a much more salient interest in political
affairs.

In Table 2 the results based on responses to two political
questions in a large study among blacks conducted for the Buthelezi
Commission.   These responses illustrate the very high and growing
politicisation of black people.

Table 2.

BLACK POLITICAL THINKING

Responses to two items tapping political consciousness.

*"It is best for black people to be careful in politics and not get
into trouble".*   (1981   n   1 400)

DISAGREE (reject caution approach)

Witwatersrand	50%
18-24 years	54%
Durban-Pietermaritzburg	61%
Rural	51%
Squatters	40%
1977 sample - Wits. same interviewers and sample design.	30%

*"If government does not bring changes in lives of black people in next 10
years - what from the following will definitely happen?"*   (1981   n   1 400)

	Durban-Pmbg.	Wits.
boycotts of shops	26%	37%
people leave for military training	56%	51%
youth disturbances	57%	59%
mass strikes	65%	64%
lose hope-forget problems	2%	6%
too frightened to take action	9%	17%

The single most politicising of our various regulatory statutes
is the Bantu Urban Areas Act (or influx-control laws). Migrant workers
and people in informal housing (squatters) give this legislation as
one of their greatest concerns and problems. Any explanation that
influx control simply regulates the flow of people to match the
capacity of the job-market is unconvincing to these blacks, and
their perceptions are not without logic. They believe that given a
more free immediate access to employers they would not be doomed to
the long and unrelieved periods of unemployment which they fear. They
believe that casual work and temporary duties would be available from
time to time to ensure survival at least. There is perhaps a great
deal of truth in this. The bureaucratic constraints on employment
of black people as casual labourers, domestics, gardeners, loaders, packers,
etc., may even cause employers to reduce labour intake, to rationalise
and mechanise. Employment tends to be unusually restricted to a more
privileged few. Influx control is also seen to interfere with normal
options for improving work status through moving around. We should
consider that numerous studies throughout the world show that the mobile
employee tends to advance more quickly than the static worker.

In intensive studies of the quality of life among black people
we have found that, despite the discontents in daily life, working towards
and maintaining a stable family life is the greatest source of
satisfaction and is one of the few havens from the effects of the social
structure. The "refuge" of a stable family is associated with a house
and reasonable security of tenure. Among long-settled urban people
housing aspirations are quite high and great emphasis is placed on
durability and size of the house. Among urbanising people, a self-
constructed wattle and daub house costing between R200 and R200, fairly
close to the city in the peri-urban areas, with water and transport
nearby, is a remarkably fulfilling achievement. Given security of
tenure these informal houses are spontaneously improved or initially
constructed to be an inexpensive equivalent of a formal township house
in terms of basic standards.

Table 3

MIGRANT WORKERS : RESIDENTIAL SITUATION AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

(sample, nation-wide, N 676)

Proportions REJECTING the statement:

"*It is best to be careful in politics and not risk getting into trouble*"

	% Disagreement
- control group	36%
- private lodgers	27%
- shack-dwellers	29%
- hostel-dwellers attempting to find other accommodation or to urbanise permanently	47%

4. ATTITUDES TO CAPITALISM AS AN AGENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

The final feature of black development aspirations which deviates from a theoretical basic needs pattern is a surprising interest in and appreciation for small-scale capitalism. In study after study, the desire to become a small entrepreneur emerges as a priority after income, education, housing, family unity, support for family and security of tenure.

In study after study black respondents, rural and urban, have complained about restrictions on small-scale trading and small-scale services and manufacture. In every squatter area, the informal business sector accounts for a substantial minority source of income (up to 30-35% in fact). Studies in KwaZulu have shown that tens of thousands of jobs are informally created: the numbers of jobs so created rank with the number of work opportunities created in growth points (although the latter are better paid).

This source of income could grow and serve as a cushion against the effects of unemployment if blacks could gain, greater access, as low-level hawkers, to the affluent white markets in the urban areas. My view is that, given the harsh realities of unemployment, South Africa has to start moving towards the flexibility of low-level opportunity that one finds in South East Asian economies.   It is not only a safety valve, but an excellent source of training.

Unfortunately, the positive views of black small-scale capitalism are more-or-less directly the opposite of images of the large capitalist enterprises in which most blacks work.

In Table 4 results are presented from the large nation-wide study of migrant workers conducted in 1982 as can been seen, the image of large employers is far from favourable.   It is also clear that political attitudes interact with images of capitalism, as the results in the bottom of the table will suggest.

Table 4

ATTITUDES TO S.A. INDUSTRY   Image of Capitalists
          (sample of 676 migrant workers — 1982)

"Which of the following do you think are true of most (described) *owners of factories and work places where people like you work?"*

try to help black by appealing to government	10%
pay as much as possible without losing profit	38%
help black by providing work	69%
work with and support government	78%
replace blacks with machines	83%
do not allow blacks to show ability	83%
call for police help in disputes	90%
get as much for as little pay	91%
favour Indians and coloureds	94%
strongest positive factor is providing work	69%
among ANC supporters (n 135 - 45%) this drops to	49%

Nevertheless, both the results of research for the Buthelezi Commission and other results from the study of migrant workers show that, in principle, (i.e. hypothetically, in a black society to the North) urban Africans particularly, despite their political frustrations would favour a full-enterprise economy over a system of state ownership. Results in Table 5, taken from both these studies, illustrate this trend, and also show how far-less "capitalistically" oriented migrant workers are.

Table 5

BLACK ECONOMIC IDEOLOGY

THINK OF AFRICAN COUNTRY RULED BY AFRICANS TO THE NORTH.....

	Durban 1981 %	Migrant 1982 %
Business owned by private black-men working hard OR	77	52
Business owned by black government	22	48
Factories managed by black elected government	25	32
Factories managed by private businessmen of any race	58	38
Factories managed by businessmen and workers	17	31
Government which is mainly concerned with care of poor, unemployed OR	73	59
Government mainly concerned with growth, with many wealthy people and many jobs	26	39

5. BROAD CONCLUSIONS

This outline of the range of more important, typical black perceptions of development needs will come as no surprise to most informed employers. In conclusion, however, I would simply like to re-emphasise one or two points.

Firstly, far too many of the development and life-quality aspirations which ordinary black people regard as normal and human, are legislated against or strictly controlled in our highly-administered society. There is a constant source of unnecessary politicisation in our society. Not only is this dangerous to stability but it also does injury to our self-proclaimed ethic of free private enterprise. A careful consideration of this is the responsibility of white businessmen who owe their advantages to the system of private enterprise.

Secondly, situations are emerging in South Africa in which people are squeezed by simultaneous ejection from impoverished and over-crowded rural areas and rejection by the administration of black urban areas. More research needs to be undertaken to specify the size and dynamics of the problem, but a problem it is which could easily destroy the staiblity of our migrant labour force in a short time to come. Here again, positive inputs by the private sector are required. These steps must include a consideration of private sector initiatives in community development for these people of "no world" - the migrant workers. The neglect of this category of people shows very clearly in our results.

Finally, the results I have presented show just how complex black needs and aspirations are. It is patently absurd in our society that whites should continue to try to plan and legislate for blacks, given this complexity. While one realises that great impediments exist at the moment as regards an extention of the vote to black people, the very least we need is that some official statutory body be established in which existing cabinet and black leaders can debate and share decisions on matters of policy for our common economy.

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