

EMPLOYMENT, PRODUCTIVITY, DISTRIBUTION AND EQUITY:

Some Reflections from sub-Saharan Africa

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Woe unto them who add field unto field
Until there is no place.

Blessed is he who makes
Two blades to grow
Where only one grew before.

The labourer is worthy of his hire.

Man does not live by bread alone.

Twenty years largely wasted....
Trying to learn to use words and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, of the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it.And what there is to
conquer... has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times by men whom one cannot hope to
emulate - but there is no competition -
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying....
Who are only undefeated
Because we have gone on trying.

- "The Dry Salvages"
T. S. Eliot

Introduction

The Prophets denouncing land amassment (and resulting wrack renting tenancy) and the non-practice of the Jubilee Year redemption (forgiveness) of land and debt may seem far from the problems of employment and unemployment as seen in industrial economies. They may seem equally unrelated with the blessing on enhanced output which the profits of the Green Revolution are eager to amass to their wealth. The "casual" (albeit not in the necessity or arduousness of the job) agricultural labourer of the Gospel may seem rather far removed from the unionised factory worker (albeit not from the "stoop" labour Cesar Chavez seeks to organise) and the prelude to the Gospel miracle a reason to put the other topics aside as secondary. The last quotation indeed can be taken - viewing its author's conclusion as evidence of failure to comprehend his own failure - as a warning against going on trying to grapple with unemployment because it always has been with us, is now and ever shall be, crisis without end Amen.

But that is not how it looks from sub-Saharan Africa - from parched farmlands or mechanised irrigation schemes from which smallholders have been "relocated" (as the scheme descriptions carefully tell us usually with less precision on how or where and none on with what results) - from the half deserted offices where a minimum wage earning clerk has about a fifth of minimum decent subsistence needs if he or she is single and a twenty fifth if seeking to support a household or the silent hospital amid an epidemic of twenty year cured diseases reborn by a collapse of nutrition and medical services which it can know but not touch as the budget for vaccines is ended (or as the budget line says "Pro Memoria", like the human beings its absence has sentenced to die) - from the bustling market where "Kiosk Rules - OK" but the average 'customer' can only feast eyes on what two decades past parents (or a younger self) bought or an urban "low income area" (or "decanting zone" for "improved self help housing" schemes' victims) where "100% access to pure water" is real...if each household uses one pail a day and takes 3 minutes to fill it on a 24 hour a day queue at the taps...assuming all are in working order.

Very few people are unemployed - except refugees with no access to land, no access to even 'casual' labour and next to none to any self employment except that so little productive as to be a mockery and even they are - from dawn to dusk and from 5 to 80 - very much employed, at begging. The reason is simple enough: with no state unemployment relief (or survival support for the

unemployed) and a breakdown of traditional systems (or of many individuals' and households' links to them) to be unemployed in the industrial economy sense would mean death by starvation.

For two thirds of the economically active the basic question of employment is not that of finding a job but of finding access to useable land to till and means to till it for her (two thirds of crop production is done by women) to provision the household and have something to sell or to contribute to his (three quarters of cash sales are from men's portion of production) small commercial output. For only a tenth does employment mean a wages or salaried position as most residents of the industrial world have come to know them. The other quarter are 'self employed' - as 'casual' labourers pushing carts and carrying bales; hawking tee shirts or cabbages or thirty varieties of fourteen grains the casual 'expert' sees as indistinguishable; cooking noon meals to sell on the edge of storm drains (too often open sewers); mending worn out shoes (or making new) from five times worn out retread tyres or watches with bits of wire for tools and parts (yes, sometimes they do tell time again); dyeing bright patterned cloths (with 50% interest on the cloth and dyes - a week that is - and 75% margin on the cost - if the buyer does not bargain too hard or go to one of fifty other sellers); serving as unpaid apprentices to an artisan or, scrabbling to begin a motor repair 'business' with a cracked spanner, a half tin of used oil, a broken file and a patched inner tube.

Here the standard international organisation - trade union as much as any other - definitions of employment, self employment and unemployment wilt in the sun and blur into sodden ink stained blotting paper when the rains come. The Old Testament economy is distinctly closer. If unemployment means inability to be productive enough, enough days in the year and fairly enough paid to live at a minimum physically and socially acceptable standard on what one produces, unemployment in the non-industrial world is 33 to 40% according to ILO estimates. Or using the World Bank's definition of "absolute poverty" in sub-Saharan Africa it is over 50% (65% of rural and 35% of urban households).

Here too the debate on budget deficits and too expensive social services has a different focus if one looks beneath the international terms in which (doubtless to the comfort of both the international and domestic discussants) it is usually carried on. Government health budgets average 1% of Gross

Domestic Product - i.e. there is \$3 per human being per year to pay for doctors, nurses, cleaners, building, beds, meals, drugs, syringes, linen or rather \$6 per human being with "access to" (that is within 3 miles radius) of a health facility as over half are not. Surprisingly somehow that does mean 2 visits per human being (one must suppose 4 for those with "access" and none for the others) per year. But this is on average - in one poor country it is 0.26% (\$0.85 or \$2.80 for those with access) and 0.4 (1.33 with "access") visits per year and in another (supposedly yet poorer) it is 1.25% (\$3.00 but only \$4.25 with "access" as here it is 70% or higher) and 4 visits (3 in rural, 10 in urban areas) a year. The \$ are on the face of it trivial, the difference on the ground and to the would-be patient is that between a disintegrating, half gangrenous remnant of a national medical service which often cures the nutrition problems of vultures (including those who control the flow - and leakage - of drugs and salaries) better than other ills and a desperately stretched, drug starved emaciated one which is still trying and still doing much (especially now it has a transfusion of \$6 million - \$0.33 per human being - a year of additional basic drugs). To the fiscal 'experts' (in fairness not all and not all from at least one of the most criticised agencies) the difference is slightly different - the first country is carrying out an exemplary fiscal adjustment and the latter is profligate and unwilling to "improve austerity" and "cut out fat".

The old urban/rural distinction too begins to waver like a mirage in the far flung, long lasting droughts that have driven millions into urban slums and more millions into treks to less disastrously wracked rural areas where their pressure now sets off environmental degradation eating the once non-marginal land from within like a cancer faster than the desert claws at the exposed margins. The poorest rural households do not "at least have their food", they grow little else but not enough to provision themselves for the "hungry season" before the harvest even in good years. They must seek off farm work - from less poor farmers usually - in a "free" market with the only remaining constraints on exploitation extended kinship and community "archaic traditional values". The typical urban household needs five or six pieces of employment (however, wherever and whatever) to exist (or more politely subsist) again largely to be found on "free" markets constrained largely by external (and internal - in at least one case led by devout, modern Western value oriented, middle class Christians) pressures to reduce "excessive real wages" (say \$1.00 - \$2.00 per day for formal sector unskilled workers and \$2.00 - \$3.00 per day for drivers, secretaries, primary school teachers, and

other "semi-skilled") and encourage greater "diligence" and a "return to the land". The rich too are always with us - urban and rural. The proprietor of the large (subsidised) mechanised farm, the businessman with access (whether legitimate or less so) to goods to sell, the professional able to provide services (on his own or because his official job gives him the ability to do so), most of the expatriate technical assistance experts presiding over what is called aid to reconstruction; these are not poor and whether the proportion who act as "good Samaritans" is higher than that in the Gospel case is somewhat doubtful.

No - the poor of sub-Saharan Africa do not live by bread alone. Except in the most crushing of disasters (communal or household) they are human beings with pride as well as a frightening humility born of desperate need, hope as well as despair, joy as well as grief. To assert that the anomie written on too many faces in many Asian metropolises and villages or in too many burning riot headlines in the UK press is not the norm in Africa is true - one of the few consoling truths. The statistics do not tell the whole story but they do not lie either. Christ fed the 5,000 (or the 4,000) and He needed the 5 loaves and 2 fishes (or possibly slightly more or less - then as now empirical evidence from different observers is imprecise and open to different interpretations even when the basic facts and meaning are clear enough) and He saw it as appropriate to do so before He preached. The emandation that drops the "alone" from the words is modern not biblical and falsifying not simplifying.

The following table - like all tables reciting aggregated averages - makes reality too simple, too homogenous and too easy on the reader who does not live in the reality behind it. But with an effort of will, to which its figures do provide a staring point, it does provide a vivid and far from consoling sketch of what poor sub-Saharan Africa is and what Ghana (a quarter century ago the blazing star of hope for prosperity and health and education and employment that half a continent saw as lighting the way onward and up) has become. That is the objective correlative behind any sets of concepts, any arrays of words, anything one wants to say or the way in which one needs to be disposed to say it about employment and unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa today.

TABLE
SELECTED QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS:
1960 - MID 1980's

	<u>Ghana</u>		<u>Late</u> <u>1970's</u>	<u>1980's</u>	<u>Low Income Sub-</u> <u>Saharan Africa</u> <u>(1982)</u>
	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>			
1. Average Life Expectancy at Birth	45	49	55	53	48
2. Infant Mortality Rate	132	107	86	107-120	118
3. Child Death Rate	27	21	15	25-30	24
4. Access to Health Facility (b)	-	-	-	30	45
5. Public Health Facility Visits Per Person Per Year	-	-	0.7	0.4	2(f)
6. Health Budget as % of GDP	-	1.2	-	0.26	0.95
7. Access to Pure Water (c)					
Rural	-	14	14	48	14
Urban	-	86	86	75	62
Total	-	35	35	60	22
8. Access to Excreta Disposal (d)					
Rural	-	40	40	30	25
Urban	-	92	95	65	69
Total	-	55	56	44	32
9. Average Calorie Availability as a % of requirements	92	97	88	68	91
10. Child Malnutrition (Moderate/Severe)	-	-	36	50-55	40
11. Primary Education Enrollment Ratio (e)	38(46)	64(75)	69(80)	-(80)	69(-)
12. Adult Literacy	27	30	-	35-45	44
13. Education Budget as % of GDP	-	3.9	-	0.85	2.81
14. Proportion of Population Below Absolute Poverty Line (f)					
Rural	-	-	60-65	67-1/2- 72-1/2	65
Urban	-	-	30-35	45-50	35

Principal Sources: World Bank, Comparative Analysis and Data Division, Economic Analysis and Projections Department (June 1984), World Development Report 1985; UNICEF, Statistics On Children In UNICEF Assisted Countries (April 1985); Ghana: Situation Analysis of Women and Children (July 1984).

- Notes:
- a) 1960 data refer to a year between 1959 and 1961; 1970 between 1969 and 1971; late 1970's between 1975 and 1980; 1980's to 1982, 1984 or 1985.
 - b) Defined in terms of location within a 5 kilometre radius. May overstate for Urban population when facilities available are small.
 - c) 1970 and late 1970's Urban figures may be overstated by failing to relate number of water points to population.
 - d) 1970 and 1978 figures for Urban and possibly Rural areas overstate by failing to relate number of drop-holes to supposed user population.
 - e) Adjusted for length of primary cycle. () are unadjusted figures. Because of the primary/middle school division Ghana has a shorter primary cycle than most SSA countries.
 - f) Estimate for this study on basis fragmentary data.

Poverty and Productivity: Continuity and Change

Sub-Saharan Africa has always been poor. The basic cause of poverty has been low productivity (however and by whomsoever caused or defined). The only way to overcome poverty (in a human sense relevant to a majority of poor people) has been to enable them to produce more. These realities pre-date the arrival of the Europeans, the slave trade and pre-colonial neo-colonialism and remain veridical in states which are not merely post-colonial but also in will and in significant ways in fact post neo-colonial. To talk about ending poverty in Africa primarily by consumption transfer payments is to talk nonsense - on outputs of \$150 - \$500 per capita it cannot be done. But equally to talk about ending poverty without enabling the poor to produce more as well as receive basic services and fair payment for what they produce, no matter how well intentioned the state nor how much it tries to raise access to services and to modern sector wage employment is to talk about the unreal, that route too is "no through road" (as the example of Botswana - which has tried, in good faith, with relatively large resource allocations, under conditions unusually favourable to this effort - demonstrates by its successes and their built-in limitations as well as by the continuing failures writ large in both income distribution and child malnutrition as well as in employment).

However, 1985 is not 1965 (even if in some cases - not by any means all - one might wish it were even in a static sense and much more because it would 'redeem' twenty years "largely wasted" for a new, different and - perhaps - less profoundly unsatisfactory history to be written). There are changes in the nature, distribution and immediate causes of poverty.

To analyse at this level is to abstract - the international economic environment and its evolution are taken as given. At one level that is profoundly false. Until the late 1970s a majority of SSA economies - and a majority of human beings in some of that majority - were moving forward in overall and average productivity terms and in access to basic services. The prime reason that is no longer true is the result of a harsher external economic environment (compounded by a worsened weather cycle) since 1968 and especially since 1978. Without changes for the better in that environment any assault upon unemployment and poverty in most of sub-Saharan Africa will be a process painfully long and slow in showing results (with all but a few of the present poor dead long before they could benefit) and in many cases literally

Sisyphian (the rock rolled up to within sight of the plateau will with a slight mistake, a drought, a commodity price collapse roll back down crashing and crushing all in its path). That should be taken as a given and taken into account in overall perspectives and proposals.

It is not analysed in depth here for four reasons:

1. to do so would require separate papers (some of which the present author has written elsewhere);
2. many of Africa's problems are internal and not inherent consequences of the post 1969 world economic loss of forward momentum;
3. Africa is not the pivot nor the lever on which or by which the world economy will be moved and thus in a global (not an African) sense is somewhat peripheral - even if integral - to any overall designing of pivots, levers and hands to place the one and press the other;
4. unless changes internal to Africa are achieved by Africans no conceivable world economic recovery will more than ameliorate the absolute poverty of many of Africa's human beings. To understand that is no justification for non-Africans to stand by with folded hands (in prayer or behind the back, safely out of range of pockets), pursed lips or averted eyes. But it is probably a precondition to African efforts which can be supported with much faith in their enduring success or meaningful involvement with (as opposed to casting crumbs and casting off clothing to) Africans as external junior partners in a common endeavour.

In 1965 sub-Saharan Africa had food shortages: there were hungry seasons before harvest (and after stocks ran low) in many mono-seasonal, low rainfall zones; poor people were frequently hungry; overall nutrition levels measured by average calorie availability (and still more when disaggregation on the basis of household income and size was possible) were below standard acceptable levels; severe drought and flood related localised famines were recurrent. But physical food shortages in the sense of unmet effective demand with money chasing absent food (as food prices shot up) were uncommon; national food balances in most countries were approximately in balance (with most net importers having the foreign exchange to do so in most years);

drought/disaster relief, even if unevenly and imperfectly, was able to avert hoardes of migrants and huddles of starving human beings. The television images of 1984-1985 were not absent simply because television was less far flung - so were the realities the images reflect.

Over 1965-1985 the trend growth of agricultural production has been perhaps 2%, of domestic food perhaps 2.25% and of non-food (domestic industrial and export) crops at most 1% a year versus 2.75 to 3% overall, 6 to 7% urban and 2% rural population growth. In other words average food production per capita is 25% below what it was two decades ago and that per agriculturally employed household about the same.

Small wonder that food prices have in general risen faster than other basic cost of living items or that - given output trends - small farmers have not benefitted, indeed have lost ground as their non-food crop cash incomes have in real terms declined from per capita volume falls and lower real unit prices largely enforced by world price movements even if exacerbated in some cases by domestic policies (or the fiscal advice of the World Bank and IMF in the extreme cases of 1983-85 Ghana and 1982-85 Uganda).

Equally unsurprising is the rise of endemic malnutrition and epidemic famine. Falling per capita availability ensures the former and by cutting down household and national safety margins paves the way for the latter whenever weather (or import capacity) suffers from an external shock. And external shocks have come thicker and faster since 1970 than over the previous decade and a half. The weather has on average been worse in the Sahel and the Savannah zones of West Africa, in the Horn and the Sudan, in Kenya and Southern Africa - whether cyclically or secularly is still open to doubt (or hope). The international economic environment has reverted to that of the 1930s and 1940s rather than the - in retrospect unusually favourable no matter how relative that may have been - one of the latter 1950s, 1960s and 1975-78. Whatever disaster support mechanisms - household or state - had been built up were both frayed from inadequate maintenance and hit with ever heavier and more frequent loads to bear. What television has beamed around the world is the final, most acute stage of this sequence.

Rural poverty has increased. The number and proportion of rural households in absolute poverty has - at least since 1979 - risen. The slow rise in rural

access to basic services has been reversed (in quality and effectiveness and increasingly often even in raw quantitative terms) as has the fall in child malnutrition and - less clearly as yet but even more ominously - those in infant and child mortality. The answer UNICEF's poster puts to its query above the face of an African child "What do you want to be when you grow up?" - "Alive." is a reflection of the necessary nature of priorities and immediate concerns in poor rural and urban households in most of Africa today and is a reflection of how lack of meaningful employment differs in degree and kind of impact between rural (and increasingly urban) Africa and even the most deprived inner city ghettos of Western Europe or the USA.

The basic problem is increasingly one of productivity. Until poor rural households can produce more, no juggling of their incomes relative to those of poor urban workers (or even less poor ones) will solve national nor rural food balances. And nor will there be any lasting solution to poor rural household (basic self provisioning and cash income requirements) national (foreign exchange and fiscal) expenditure capacity and requirements balances which do not amputate the latter to 'fit' the former. To characterise the underlying problem as exploitation or inequity is at one level true but also misleading since it is not primarily at the level normally understood by users of those terms. The key problems seem to be:

1. lack of tools (the widespread reversion to wooden hoes is a forceful illustration of return to traditional but hardly appropriate or productive technologies) and inputs (e.g. seed) poor farmers need to produce more;
2. a similar lack of knowledge on how they could produce more, whether it would be financially viable for them to do so (and under what conditions) or whether the proposed techniques are "user friendly" for peasants (and especially women) relating not so much to the scale but the quality, targeting and productivity (or rather its absence) of most agricultural research units;
3. combined with a similar lack of knowledge (and or resource backing) for productivity enhancing cost efficient programmes in respect to basic health care, education and access to pure (or any) water and to fuel. The malnourished, the ill, the illiterate, the (notably women and girls)

exhausted from up to eight hours a day (on average perhaps four) of wooding and watering are not able to work harder, longer, more 'intelligently'; to adopt new methods (especially if these entail risks and thus imperil the tenuous handhold on survival - the dead do not benefit from subsequent "average year" gains nor do those whose seed stock and ability to buy tools and clothes and medical care are wiped out in a first "atypical year"); to respond to campaigns to improve sanitation by digging safe pit latrines (much less buying concrete for slabs and pipes for venting) no matter how carefully and appropriately designed the applied technology or how culturally adapted the promotion (and often they are neither);

4. and exacerbated by an economically misguided and distributionally disastrous pumping of funds into mechanised large farms whose output levels, costs and even foreign exchange implications are disastrously poor compared to those of small farmer oriented programmes and into shoring up expensive, limited access fragments of the "lost kingdom" of modern services (e.g. in one West African country 80% of the health budget for a region of 1,000,000 people goes on inadequate maintenance, non living wages of staff and almost invisible food and drug supply to the hulk of what was the regional hospital which could if fully operational serve perhaps 75,000 of them while in primary health care posts the 'lucky' ones covered by it make do almost entirely on the "supplementary" basic drug kits of a small international agency);
5. and in some - not infrequent and by definition too many - cases underpinned by a faith in the inadequacy and conservatism and inherent productive irrelevance of the small farmer expressed variously: "we will never be able to buy substantial staple food supplies from small farmers"; "the chief obstacle to rural development is the peasant"; "they are hungry and poor because they are lazy" - sentiments which when acted on do enforce self fulfillment by the peasant farmer and which the Ecumenical Movement should realise are not uncommon among responsible, respectable Christians (Africans as well as expatriates) not necessarily excluding even church leaders and delegates to Vancouver. Colonial in origin these prejudices may be (traditionally agriculture was an honourable - if not always very much rewarded or desired for oneself - occupation in most African cultures) but up to a quarter century after

independence, far from being bit by bit put in the rubbish bin of misguided importations along with street names and statues of conquerors, they are in danger of becoming the new tradition.

These forms of exclusion and inequity interact with more nakedly exploitative ones and with ones which prejudice many small peasants whether they benefit anyone else or not. Access to decent land with access to transport (and buyers) is increasingly scarce whatever the average land/person ratio. And whatever else they may be and however different in other ways most African traditional land tenure systems and standard Western freehold tenure in situations of land scarcity are biased against the poor, against the newcomer (whether migrant or local labour force entering youth) and against women. So too - with very rare exceptions - are public, co-operative and private channels for distributing anything scarce (from yellow fever shots to having ones crop bought, from primary school places to hoes and cutlasses, from credit for input purchase to servicing a broken water system). This is not always with any exploitative intent: travelling on very bad roads to small and uncertain sources of supply is not sound business if larger, surer, more numerous sources on less bad routes will fill a wholesaler/transporter's whole lorry fleet; it is harder to relate to 3,000 odd dispensaries and clinics than to 100 hospitals; an enemployed, underfed, massed urban proletariat (and one which is often desperate and objectively fully justified in its desperation) is more threatening than quietly, invisibly dying infants and prematurely aging and dying peasants four hundred miles away in a region perhaps five per cent of decision takers and senior technocrats have ever visited. But whatever the causes, whether anyone benefits or not, the objective reality for the rural poor is one of exclusion and oppression to a degree making it impossible for growing numbers to sustain, let alone raise, their productivity.

And In The Cities "Paved With Gold"

The urban poor of Africa are not a new phenomenon of the 1980s. The inner slums and ex-urban "decantment" areas (when inner slums were upgraded out of their residents means) have been there and growing for at least four decades. But there are changes quantitatively and qualitatively and not for the better.

The dumping grounds - within and without formal city limits - are much larger (at least in numbers consigned and confined to them if not always in hectarage) absolutely and relative to both national and non-rural population. In 1976 it was possible (albeit probably already out of date) to argue that under a tenth of sub-Saharan Africa's absolutely poor lived in urban areas. That is no longer a plausible claim and even if it were, clusters of 80,000 to 250,000 souls in abject poverty - in many respects worse than any rural slum except a camp of starving refugees from drought and/or "social disorder" (an antiseptic catch-all phrase covering South African aggression, the brutal oppression of an Amin or an Ngwema, the continuing Imperial Will to enforce its edicts on the "outlands" in Ethiopia, the anarchic civil wars of the Tchod, the - varied causally and symptomatically but uniform in imposing costs - partial or total disintegration of services and even the state in numerous politics) - matter even if they constitute only 10 to 20% of all human beings in a country living in absolute poverty.

For the urban poor 1985 is much worse than 1965 or 1975. Real food price increases have done the majority of small peasant households no good - they have done poor urban ones immense harm. Real access to services in low income urban areas was better (less bad) than in rural, but in some four times the 1965 population have access to almost the same number of water point and aqua privies - indeed basically the same ones and much the worse for wear and non-maintenance - and so little access to public primary school places that private schools are mushrooming when typical household incomes are one quarter the level an international agency's experts thought barely adequate to buy a minimum, nutritionally sound diet.

Minimum wages - and the lower typical "informal" urban sector incomes - are now in many countries no longer above typical (excluding the top 10% and bottom 30%) peasant household incomes from agriculture if self provisioning of food and shelter is valued at urban retail prices. That is not true only in countries like Tanzania where lesser urban/rural inequality has been not merely a goal but one backed (admittedly not always very wisely and often even less successfully) with a massive pro-rural policy and (in contrast to sources) resource allocation bias. It is also true of polities like Ghana which can hardly be accused of (or praised for) any such policy or resource pattern nor, indeed, have adumbrated and consistent goals on the issue. Unfortunately this is for the wrong reason - the urban poor have been getting

poorer faster than the rural poor. "Achieving" typical peasant household incomes up to 150% of the urban minimum wage (as both Tanzania and Ghana seem to have done) is not of much comfort to peasant households when neither can lift the household out of absolute poverty and access to basic services is deteriorating in qualitative and sometimes quantitative terms for both (clearly both in Ghana though on balance not quantitatively and less rapidly qualitatively in Tanzania).

The foundation reason is once again inadequate productivity in or of employment. Even with collapsing real wages, modern sector wage employment is at or below late 1970s highs in a majority of SSA economies whereas overall population is 25 to 33% (and urban sometimes over 50%) higher. In most a modern sector wage growth as fast as population would require 5% to 9% annual real output growth whereas plausible 'optimistic' estimates range from 1% to 5.5%.

The exhaustion of the "rural sponge" (i.e. more households with less complementary resources crowding onto less and on average worse land per household with few technical or other changes capable of lifting productivity) and the stagnation of the formal job market make the "informal" urban sector the most rapidly expanding source of employment. As its basic customers have falling incomes and technical changes, while real, are limited this too means dividing a slowly growing total real output among a rapidly growing number of households dependent on it. There are now only too self evidently many more women and men selling cloth and garments in Accra's main markets than in 1965 but, with the national consumption of cloth and garments down, the impression that they look shabbier and more worried than in 1965 is likely to be an equally valid if even less documented one.

Doubtless the informal sector averts starvation, but not absolute poverty. Doubtless it uses "appropriate" technology - i.e. makes do with bits and pieces even usually at the cost of low and on average declining productivity because for most of the human beings trapped in it there are no less bad options known and accessible to them. To praise its "resilience" and "vitality" is in one sense proper - much of the modern sector has done worse; to survive and to remain human in such a context is an achievement. But on the lips of affluent experts, however intentioned, these phrases ring uncertainly or worse. - Would they accept to be "vital" and "resilient" in

these ways? Have they - the onetime prophets of the modern sector institutions they now pour scorn upon - nothing better to offer? - Is their praise a rationalisation for leaving 'well enough' alone and turning back to macro economic abstractions and modern sector specifics that interest them more, and pay them better in cash, in status and in reputation?

The assertion of the strength of traditional social systems is equally ambiguous. It is partly true. But increasing numbers of urban (and even some rural) Africans have fallen beyond any kinship support system; but when all boats sink lower (to invert Chairman Mao's statement of the desirable course of economic change) support networks weaken (less resources, more demands, more "opting out" to limit the falls in their own effective incomes); but some neo-traditional revivals - e.g. "child pawning" in West Africa with 5 to 8 year olds selling in the markets, acting as organised begging troupes, cleaning and tending shops - and one supposes workshops - (none of which are traditional in the literal sense) because parents must repay debts or disengage a mouth (apparently usually female) from the household pot - are damnable by any decent human test, including traditional African ones. To understand why these things are happening or to see that they may avert worse, e.g. child abandonment and/or infanticide which seem less rapidly growing in West Africa where "child pawning" seems to be commoner, is one thing; to accept, let alone approve, is another. In this case "after such knowledge what forgiveness" if one simply turns to the next topic seems a better guide than "to know all is to forgive all".

However, these shifts do have one very clear implication. Whatever was true in 1965, it is no longer generally humanly or productively plausible to try to fund real rural producer price or service increases by cutting real urban wages and services levels.

At Least We Know What Is Wrong And What To Do

The new conventional wisdom on Africa claims to have identified the mistakes of the past and to have cures for them. (At least it did so claim in 1981; in all fairness the blatant, brassy certainty has faded somewhat and a number of trumpets sound more uncertainly.) Certainly it has picked out a number - sometimes all - of the points made above. There are however five buts:

1. many of the criticisms were made almost as cogently (if less urgently than would seem prudent in retrospect and with less sense of how near the slippery slope was and how far down it went than is evident in 1985) by African and other critics from the early 1960s onward but a majority of the survivors of that criticism do not see the new conventional wisdom as their intellectual progeny (except perhaps as a Frankenstein monster);
2. many of the most assured agents of the new conventional wisdom should in one sense know what is wrong with the present - collectively they were (for whatever reasons and with no matter how good intentions) its dominant architects as the World Bank is unusual not in only a quarter admitting but in neither denying nor totally brushing out of sight (the surviving critics of the 1960s and 1970s to be fair are not always much more candid in analysing their own mistakes - to have played or half played Cassandra gives some claim to intellectual integrity but little to positive achievement or of ability to convey what one feared one knew);
3. the new conventional wisdom in many respects is not so new - more free markets, more primary export crops, more encouragement to private investment, higher price incentives, lower public expenditure especially on basic services and the poor (few conventional wisdom advocates choose to put their main budget cutting thrust on pure administration or military/police spending), sectoral programmes and projects whose import intensity and average technology levels are not in practice all that much lower (even if different in makeup) than those which proved unsustainable are at its core and these - whatever the rhetoric - have been the common currency of most external advice (especially that backed by funding) and most of the spending of most African governments (and their colonial predecessors) for forty years;
4. the strategic approach is remarkably broad brush, remarkably little concerned with massive national and regional differences (as if Calabria and the "stockbroker belt" of Kent - Surrey - Sussex, Stockholm's suburbs and Amsterdam's ghettos were seen as basically the same with only trivial differences in detail) and intensely resistant to operational and practical as well as normative criticisms of even the most outre of the specific detailed prescriptions deduced from the most sweeping general

hypotheses (one is tempted to say asserted revealed truths) e.g. revenue measures whose administrative requirements and high cost to revenue ratios would horrify almost any experienced "Treasury hand" whatever his views on their social and distributional impact or calls for charging full cost for vaccines against fatal epidemic diseases which may appear to be almost as lamentable macro economics or cost benefit analysis as they are socially and humanly objectionable;

5. the whole of the new conventional wisdom is production and macro economic centred often to the nearly total exclusion of distribution and human welfare (or illfare for the excluded) considerations. One is tempted to describe it as economystic as well as economic and to charge it with neglect of a basic economic (as well as human truth) one of the intellectuals it likes to claim as a progenitor - Adam Smith - saw, and in The Wealth of Nations stressed very clearly, that no nation can be great and prosperous, the majority of whose people are poor and miserable. Adam Smith indeed did not advocate consumption transfer payments - he perceived 18th Century England as too poor to make them more than a poultice which in general terms is a considerably stronger argument against viewing them as a general solution for sub-Saharan Africa in the late 20th Century. He did advocate making it possible for the poor to be more productive and to be paid more fairly. That his model of a truly equal opportunity competitive market had never existed (as he makes very plain in arguing it should) and was in fact becoming ever less attainable (as is only too clear in retrospect) is fair criticism; to claim him (or even David Ricardo) as a legitimator of treating production apart from distribution (i.e. production by whom, how, for what reward) and for treating economics as separate from "moral philosophy" (i.e. value judgements) is intellectual obtuseness or falsification and, however intended, the highroad to justifying moral insensitivity and human unconcern. Marx once thanked God he was not a Marxian, no thoughtful reader of the Wealth of Nations can easily suppose Smith's judgement on Von Mises or Friedman or Von Hayek would be dissimilar.

In terms of sub-Saharan Africa, it can be asserted that the new conventional wisdom does at least stress the small farmer as the only means of salvation rather than the chief obstacle to progress. In principle so it does. But its

small African farmer is a curious abstraction with curious priorities and calls for his (not her) participation are not based on any real attempt to inform itself on small farmer priorities but on the wisdom's revealed truth as to what they should (and therefore, in the absence of "false consciousness", must) want.

In the first place there are more qualifications about the small farmer than about most other tenets. One is not always - sometimes something or somebody else will be appropriate. Another is not all, only small farmers with above average present performance or location or access to complementary resources or some other reason for attracting the favourable view of an extension officer (i.e., back to the "progressive farmer" late colonial syndrome) which will usually exclude 95% of the poorest 50% of small farmers on one count or another. In the second place the small farmer is viewed almost as if he (as noted not she in this context) were a model corporation not a person or a head of household and one able to operate on certain, long term calculations as to risk and with ability to accept front-end loaded (i.e. early year) risk. Third, while lessening, there is still over-emphasis on macro economic variables or simplicities, e.g. higher prices as not only necessary (which may often be true but in real terms is equally often impossible) but sufficient (which is rarely true) to generate rapid output increases. Fourth, there is a grudging but growing acceptance that new, lower cost means of providing basic services are important but apparently almost wholly on the basis that the ill cannot work hard nor the illiterate learn new ways of doing things and that broad basic coverage pays better (on empirical models) than limited access narrow coverage, a view which still seems to ignore that there may just be a normative difference between a human being and a cow or a hoe or a bolt of cloth or a barn which is (and ought to be) relevant to economic policy.

Oddly enough until very recently even this degree of insight into urban workers was lacking. Real wage and salary cuts were standard advice partly to increase rural relative to urban incentives, partly to reduce costs relative to competing imports or to export competitors and partly to reduce budget deficits. The fact that the urban worker also responds to economic incentives (disincentives) and if paid much less than a subsistence wage with further real cuts predictable, will both be neither well nourished and healthy enough to work a full day and be directing his motivation to finding additional sources of income which at the best will reduce time and attention to - and

productivity of - that worker's main job rarely surfaced. As the loss - physically or effectively - of senior personnel became ever more acute, concern for a salary adequate to command competence and diligence began to surface followed recently - at least in a few cases - by a similar concern about wages. But even here the prescription is either narrowly focused or economistic - fire half the employees (especially at the bottom) and raise real pay 25 to 50% (especially at the top) with the savings to reduce borrowing (state) or enhance investment (private). This may in specific cases be eminently sound micro economic advice but unless some attention is given to what the 50% dismissed will do (and to the short term cost budget if they are given significant severance pay as, to be fair, the World Bank for one advocates), the completeness of the prescription is open to doubt. Firing modern sector wage earners may indeed make that sector leaner and healthier but by itself seems unlikely to give those fired any general access to any opportunity other than to become very lean indeed. Employment is not one of the goals of the new conventional wisdom - full employment however defined, appears to be implicitly at least excluded from the sphere of topics sensible, pragmatic economic analysts or decision takers would spend time analysing much less resources seeking to attain.

To put it bluntly: Yes, we know at several levels what has gone wrong in sub-Saharan Africa and some of the causes. We also know some things to avoid and a number it would be desirable to do. At a more basic level there is basic disagreement on what the strategic causes of failure were or are and, therefore, at the least on the necessary and sufficient conditions of halting decline and even more of attaining sustainable reversals. There is almost equal disagreement on why certain elements of failure are general in direction - if less so in degree - across what appear to be very different economies and politics in opportunities, policies and priority resource allocations and how much discernible regional, national and sub-national divergencies really do matter, how and why. There is a gulf - not to say a chasm - between zealots (not all conventional wisdom advocates by any means) who prefer to have simple, operational turnpike models to the new Africa and the sad sceptics (by no means all cynics) who assert (with the present author) that there are no simple, generally applicable, adequately explanatory models on offer except patently incomplete and almost certainly wrong ones.

What Now? Or Whence From Here?

A station master at Aberdeen one evening supposedly told an inquiring would-be passenger for Aberystwyth that he would advise starting from somewhere else at a different time. Any humanly (and almost any economically) concerned analyst of sub-Saharan Africa today has good reason to share his feelings. But Africa and Africans are in the Africa of 1985 and have no alternative starting place or time. Nor is advice to wait until things are clearer very apposite when deterioration is more common than stabilisation or recovery and when human misery and human deaths are rising.

Three basic propositions appear to be valid:

First, production matters. Without more production productive employment in Africa cannot be adequate in quantity or quality no matter how fairly rewards for work are distributed nor how much is attempted in the way of redistribution to the poor.

Second, distribution matters and should not be viewed as separate from production. Who produces what, how, under what conditions and how much largely determines both household and state income. The former distribution determines whether people (especially poor people) will have enough food, clothing, housing. The latter determines whether there will be the resources to provide (or move toward) universal access to basic services and at least a minimum disaster protection (e.g. finance relief) structure.

Third, employment matters. Its productivity and fairness of remuneration - and above all its availability - basically determine who and how many can escape from or remain out of absolute poverty and who are held in or dumped into it. Realistically - especially in SSA today - consumption transfers after initial distribution can do little to alter the initial pattern except at the pure survival level. However, that is not the only reason employment matters:

- a. employment is a basic form of participation - because economic life is important ability to participate in it is equally important;
- b. participation in production is a basic source of power - who does not produce anything critical to the economy or polity is objectively

dispensable and any entitlements she/he has to income and services are always at risk;

- c. employment is important to self respect and self definition. What a person does, the nature of relationships with others and how that doing and those relationships are seen by the person are a very large part of any human being's total reality and employment/self employment/unemployment are quantitatively and qualitatively a very large element of doing, relating, perceiving;
- d. similarly employment (including future employment for the young and past employment for the aged) is a critical element in status, i.e. how a person is perceived and related with by others. Unemployment and manifestly low productivity or unfairly rewarded employment erode status as well as self respect. Respect for the aged is usually differentiated by what they did and attitudes to children conditioned in part by their perceived employment roles and prospects.

The last two considerations are sometimes advanced rather hesitantly as being perhaps Eurocentric rather than general. At least in respect to SSA they appear to be generally more significant than (if not always in the same forms as) in Europe or North America. Status and self perception turn primarily on what a person does (or did for the aged or is likely to do for children) and how well it is done. The ranking of what is not strictly economically linked (any more than in Europe) but low productivity and low rewards (whether from low productivity or systemic unfairness) usually result in a low ranking of that type of employment in status as well as in desire to engage in it.

What Is To Be Done

There is clearly not space here for a complete set of employment strategies, programmes and policies for 250 odd rural and urban contexts in 46 independent sub-Saharan African countries. Nor would such an exercise be very appropriate for the work of AGEM nor very appropriate as a virtuoso exercise by a non-poor, non-unemployed (and hopefully non-unproductive) non-African who - even more critical - has no claim to knowing the specificities of more than a handful of those contexts.

Generalisations on the other hand always run the risk of chopping and stretching each specific case so that they give some overall illumination but are precisely inadequate as operating lights for any one case. At that risk a few observations or guidelines may be useful. There are four broad groups or clusters of productive employment in SSA:

- a. agricultural self employment
- b. other "informal" sector self employment
- c. "informal" sector wage employment
- d. "modern" sector wage employment.

In respect to agricultural self employment a number of strategic and policy requirements can be identified. Concentration on empowering the small farmers to produce more and to be more adequately rewarded for it is central. It involves more attention to knowledge creation and extension, input supply, availability of accessible buyers paying reasonable fair prices promptly and of sellers with similarly priced and located goods to buy, attention to actual farmer concerns, capabilities, methods of production, support for (not to be confused with "smother love" for or manipulation of) small farmer organisations for self organisation, self help, self servicing and self representation. Realistically this must be the major source of new productive employment in Africa over the foreseeable future (i.e. at least until 2005); not because it is an easy route but because there are no identifiable alternatives.

Other small scale self employment (the distinction made here is agricultural/non-agricultural not rural/urban) poses more problems in identifying plausible strategies. Given the large present size of the sector and the near inevitability of its growing over the next two decades, such identification is urgent. Urgency is reinforced by the fact that in many rural areas the most logical routes to raise household productivity include increasing the number of days on which 'economic' activity is possible by adding non-agricultural production during the off season. More policy oriented analysis of and reflection on the sector and its components and contexts is needed before this can be done. Preliminary points include removing regulations which - to no great social gain - impede small business; improving market access (e.g. in ways of handling public institutional purchases) and access to inputs (e.g. via semi-specialised wholesale firms

giving credit to their customers); providing an analogue to agricultural extension (often tried but usually for the top size end of this sector and with very mixed results).

"Informal" sector wage employment's expansion and remuneration depend on two basic factors: how fast the sector's productive employment opportunities can expand and what market, organisational or other safeguards exist that employees will be fairly remunerated, i.e. what constraints there are on exploiting employees. The former relates to the same issues as self employment in the sector (including overall demand growth). The degree of exploitation depends on: a.) how rapidly overall productive employment is growing (i.e. reducing the pressure of many workers chasing few jobs); b.) how much organisation of informal sector employees is feasible (usually low); c.) how much social pressures limit gross exploitation (uneven but often low and declining); d.) whether informal sector enterprises are able to secure fair prices or are themselves grossly exploited (varies widely); and e.) what the state can do via structures like Wages Councils and inspections (limited but not negligible especially if reinforced by "a" and "b" or "c").

"Modern" (i.e. recorded medium and large scale) wage employment growth (and recovery of real wages) is important. This is partly because it is an important share of total employment in at least some countries and partly because a moderately buoyant formal sector employment market seems to have some pull effect on informal sector earnings (partly by reducing labour vulnerability to exploitation and partly by increasing the market for the informal sector's goods and services). However, the most critical reason is that in the medium and long term it is not possible to raise productive self employment in agriculture rapidly enough to provide for 60 - 70% of new labour force entrants. Equally adequately productive and remunerated informal sector employment - as opposed to low productivity/low remuneration residual employment - is unlikely to grow rapidly except in parallel with formal wage employment. Therefore, by 1995 wage employment on standard international definitions needs to be increasing at a faster rate than the labour force. How to achieve this is much less than clear - even 6% growth rates of GDP on present wage employment structures and productivity trends would yield 1 to 3% wage employment growth trends. Increasing productivity of labour would, in the medium term, help - African wage labour was often relatively high cost even before low capacity utilisation ratios raised costs further because of

levels of education, training and experience. (In the medium term, because until production growth can be raised, higher productivity growth means lower employment growth.) Second, restructuring production with higher basic goods and services components may increase the employment/output ratio. For goods, this is very much may - mass market textiles do have very significant economies of scale up to 20 million square metres and the technology is not very labour intensive; fertiliser production is inherently capital intensive. For services the case is clearer - primary education and primary health care, for example, are labour intensive. Third, some economic activities can be restructured to be more labour (and less capital) intensive with positive or modest negative cost implications. Selectivity is needed - whether a product or service is a sound candidate is a contextual and empirical question. Manufacturing proper is not the most promising candidate albeit it is true that small, labour intensive "artisanal" industries (from garments through light engineering) have an unduly small share in most SSA manufacturing sectors. Construction and goods handling (packing, warehousing, loading) are more likely general areas for labour using, import and capital saving technology shifts at low cost increases (or even savings). However, designing such shifts requires serious attention. E.g. labour intensive road and highway construction on maintenance saves on imported equipment, is neutral or saving in respect to professional personnel, can be local input demand raising and import requirement reducing and may lower costs; but it requires longer forward planning and construction time, more training of workers and more semi-skilled/skilled (foremen, artisans) personnel to be effective in getting the job done.

Challenge And Response

The challenge to look again at employment (and people) as central and at productivity (and production) as a means is not one particularly welcome to holders of economic, political and intellectual power. The opposition to it in extreme cases can take the form of violence leading to martyrdom but that is not the common road. Very standard responses include:

- a. concealment and
- b. not wanting to know

Followed by assertions employment/distribution concerns

- c. create disincentives
- d. cannot be afforded (at home or globally).

One case of concealment illustrates the depth of the problem because it arose in a state which has tried - with some success - to make possible higher small farmer productivity, extend basic services, limit cuts to real minimum wages, provide food for work employment to use drought idled labour time to strengthen the community and small farmer base against the next drought.

Two years ago that country was in severe problems with the IMF on budgetary overruns. These were largely drought, basic services, production support and (genuine) external security related. Some tens of thousands of refugees from a neighbour afflicted with a drought and manipulated insurgency/banditry situation which had led to famine, fled to the country's border area. For some months not simply was there no government programme, but no government effort to mobilise others to act, no permission for publicity, a nearly total veil of silence. Clearly decision takers felt they had no money and that to publicise another relief need would endanger their international financial negotiations with severe negative implications for their own poor.

The non-government response was different. Extended kin (themselves drought hit) helped first. Next local communities including local government and churches. By then the situation was becoming nationally known - and to be fair stories were not suppressed. Voluntary organisations, churches, workers and enterprises, began to mobilise resources to help. The government position shifted; a.) it looked with favour on local and national voluntary efforts; b.) it set out to mobilise agency and NGO support for international assistance to the refugees.

Not wanting to know is also common. A hard pressed government genuinely seeking to restore production, genuinely short of resources, all too well aware its decisions have alienated significant interests and sub-classes at home and abroad does not want to see data like those set out in the table to this paper. This is likely to be true however sincere and concerned it is - evidence of failure to do enough when real efforts are being made and resources seem stretched to the limit is never very welcome.

How to overcome this willed or semi-willed ignorance must depend on the nature of the holders of power. To the extent they have an interest (for whatever reason) in broad support and broad welfare five lines of persuasion exist:

1. the human deprivation is real and either growing or at the best remaining at very high levels;
2. stabilisation and adjustment that result in macro-economic recovery but increasing human misery are analagous to the successful operation whose patience, inconveniently, dies;
3. such an adjustment process is at risk for two reasons - the misery saps ability to raise productivity and it builds up demand for reversal of the policies parallel to (or because of) which it has grown;
4. among those most at risk are the political decision takers, technocrats and intellectual architects of the policy (at any rate the citizen ones);
5. people (and often domestic and external funding sources) are willing to organise to deal with the human misery issues - certainly by self help, preferable in cooperation with the state - and do intend to achieve results.

Once the reality of the employment gap is admitted, together with at least some of its implications, one line of resistance is likely to be that changes would create disincentives. The Northern form is that "high" unemployment compensation and family support "benefits" encourage unemployment. One African variant is that "good" (i.e. living) wages and security of employment encourages laziness.

The evidence for such propositions is rather scanty. What exists suggests that if one creates contexts in which there is no economic incentive to seek to be more productive, the results of work are not self evidently useful to anybody and the work itself is both uninteresting and organised in a rigid hierarchical way, then most human beings will indeed react to by trying to bend or beat the system because they view it as oppressive. Trying to reduce or remove the oppressive (and often economically irrational) elements would

seem a more human, potentially more productive approach (and certainly one more in accord with the Gospel message) than trying to strip out what safeguards remain.

Economic disincentives do exist. (Some of course one approves - if they deter economic acts the viewer sees as immoral, undesirable or unsound.) When they deter higher production and equitable distribution they should be removed, unless there is a very strong case for them on other equity or production grounds.

What there is no case for doing is to concentrate only on measures or structures in some way safeguarding the poor's employment or self employment incomes and to do so without reference either to the costs of change or to alternative protection (e.g. food relief in camps is a disincentive to staying on the farm to save and rebuild it; therefore prompt assistance - e.g. food for work, replacement seed - on or near the farm is more efficient in production as well as human welfare terms, whereas halting food in camps and driving people out are neither).

Cost is a genuine objection. Real resources are limited. Subsidies - especially consumption transfers - especially in SSA cannot be the main means of creating employment or ensuring that its income return is adequate whatever its productivity. But in fact most subsidies go to the not so poor as often do most of the costs of those subsidies which do benefit the poor. All programmes - whether centre city reference hospitals or rural clinics, support for mechanised farming or for hoe and cutlass production - cost real resources. The questions are of choice and formulation, efficiency and priorities and ultimately whether people (and among them which people) are seen primarily as the subjects and beneficiaries of, or as the objects and inputs into, production.

Just as the EEC states choose to support the Common Agricultural Policy (a remarkably cost ineffective way of supporting small farmer employment and incomes at home and in the cases of sugar, beef and grain a remarkably effective one for eroding those of farmers and farm workers in the Third World) so too many African states subsidise household connected piped water, higher volume household electricity consumption, upper income housing, mechanised agriculture, high quality/low access hospital care. These are

choices that involve real resource use. In employment and income terms they are biased against the poor; in production terms they bias the mix of goods and services produced (and usually the incomes generated in producing them) to the rich and - in general (there are specific, context linked and limited, exceptions) have no claim to being efficient in direct production stimulation or indirect creation of incentive patterns. These choices are far more in need of exposure, scrutiny and alteration or reversal than those on general access, staple food subsidies to producers or consumers (ineffective and in need of redesign or substitution as many of the latter are in SSA). It is perhaps prudent to warn that most such choices are not made in ignorance nor do they result fully from power and pressure external to the decision advisers and takers. The basic question here is the one in the trade union song "Which side are you on?".

What Is The Call To Churches?

If the Ecumenical Movement is to be committed to making access to productive and meaningful (adequate and adequately remunerated) employment a central political economic goal and one toward which progress is made then it, Churches and Christians need to go well beyond simply analysing what is wrong and what action would be in the right direction. Neither the Ecumenical Movement's nor Churches' great strength (comparative advantage) lies in designing detailed political economic programmes and for Christians who are experts in these areas a context of Christian values and targeted concerns backed by informed criticism and solidarity is needed, not usually a religious institutional basis and still less a would-be theocratic economic system paradigm.

From intellectual discussion, the road leads to criticism, direct programmatic involvement, solidarity in support and involvement in policy dialogue. (It should lead via self examination and self criticism. Churches - especially in Africa - are not usually major employers or landlords but they are more than insignificant employers and in some cases holders of land. Their own practices often do require reflection - and amendment, e.g. why should churches in some countries seek to avoid paying the minimum wage to messengers, cleaners, and other low skilled/low pay personnel? The legal ground that they are not profit making is usually impeccable but the

consonance with "The labourer is worthy of his hire" might be thought much less self evident).

Many - probably almost all - sub-Saharan African churches are concerned about poverty, human misery, unemployment/unremunerative employment. Many Christians, especially in rural areas, are poor and are poor because they cannot produce more (are unproductively employed). But this concern does not seem to be focused on employment nor especially on broad structural policy concerns, constraints and possibilities. Rather more reflection would appear appropriate on whether employment is central, what employment is, why it matters, for whom it is crucial and how it might be furthered.

In addition, it must be recognised that most church leaders and central structures are non-poor and non-rural. The immediacy and tangibility of their understanding of employment concerns and needs in rural Africa and African urban slums is not always evident. Indeed sometimes one can detect echoes, or more, of the laziness, conservatism, ignorance, wasteful subsidy lines of secular establishment insensitivity in their voices (which is perhaps less than surprising - many of the individuals articulating what are in practice and/or intent hard line anti-poor positions are practicing Christians).

Church social action (services) in SSA is usually health and education focused. A continuing strand - but usually a smaller one - is rural development (sometimes creative and radical, sometimes paternalistic and ultra-conservative. A newer one - again usually smaller - is a range of creative experimental or pilot social projects (e.g. low cost accommodation for young working women from rural areas, urban women's craft production cooperatives, para psychological services). A sadly necessary recent growth area is supplementary feeding.

Except for some of the rural development and urban co-op work these are not directly employment directed. This may not be a mistaken choice - many of the services are critical in sustaining or developing ability to work productively; broad employment/productivity generation programmes are certainly not within Churches' financial capacity. But it seems to be a rather unexamined choice - the balance may well be too little pilot employment project oriented. In addition it must be admitted that - as with SSA as a whole - many of the services remain too externally dependent not only for

funding but also for personnel.

Participation in public policy dialogue is a very uneven area, but in all candour cannot - especially, but not only, on employment - be termed a general strength of SSA churches.

Yes, the context is often unpropitious, i.e. open criticism is ignored, rejected or suppressed; free discussion or dialogue is either not accepted or accepted only in structures closed to Churches. Yes, many Churches and Christians have courage and have spoken out against abuses (albeit these have rarely turned on employment, at least as such). Uganda's martyred Archbishop Janani Luwum is an extreme case, but he is not alone in dying because he rebuked principalities and powers in the name of the Gospel message and less extreme cases of speaking truth knowing the consequences would include some degree of repression are not uncommon.

But... in countries with moderately open states, permitting some degree of criticism, genuinely concerned with the poor and their incomes, vaguely pro-religious bodies (and there are a number in Africa), the lack of creative interaction (including criticism and initiatives) is often deafening. In other cases the degree of stridency and negativism (interspersed with silence) in Church criticism whatever else can be said of it does not contribute to dialogue influencing particular strategies and programmes.

In any case a pre-condition for full dialogue is more thinking by the Churches about employment. That would include thinking through how approaches demonstrated viable in Church projects could be maintained and generalised (the latter at least probably involving a need for at least partial state funding and staffing in most of SSA). To enter into dialogue with no clear ideas on topics or goals is unlikely to be very useful - except to another party wishing to manipulate and use Churches as a cover or a chorus of praise-singers.

Mobilisation on economic matters - especially employment as such - by African Churches is uncommon. The exceptions all too often appear to be as a part of a middle class coalition defending rather specific middle class interests.

It can be argued that most Africans are not Christians and Churches (as noted

above) are neither economic think tanks nor economic action groups and for both reasons Church leadership in mobilisation on economic issues is inappropriate as well as unlikely. There is something in both arguments but perhaps less than appears at first glance. In many African countries Christians are a plurality. Nor if the argument against action by Churches alone on economic mobilisation rests on respect for other faiths is it clear why joint discussion, suggestion mobilisation with Islamic and/or "traditional" faith bodies is not a more logical alternative than withdrawal. Equally Churches are in many African countries the best organised, largest voluntary organisations. Absolutely weak they may be, but in terms of mass membership, organisation, finance, personnel, ability to communicate and some degree of freedom from violent repression they are relatively strong. (The role of the Churches in the Namibian Liberation Struggle illustrates the latter point very clearly; admittedly not the former as 80 to 90% of Namibians are Christians). The prophet who said "Here I am. Send me", and the apostle who located the (apparently quite inadequate) "5 loaves and 2 small fishes" may be examples for further reflection on economic mobilisation. It is again unclear why solidarity/joint action with peasants and worker organisations (if they exist) are not seen as the appropriate alternative to separate, specifically Church action.

Again, however, Church examination (including self examination of attitudes, actions and membership) is a pre-condition. One may be able to mobilise without knowing clearly about what, nor having any clear ideas as to for what, but that is more likely to be a highroad to manipulation, repression and future demobilisation than either to proclaiming the Gospel message's relevance to economic justice, production and employment convincingly or to achieving real progress toward the labourer having access to a job and a fair reward for it.

These reflections, like the paper as a whole, are concentrated on independent sub-Saharan Africa and the Churches of SSA. Only they can (or should) take the leadership in Africa on Christian involvement with employment. Churches, Christians and the global Ecumenical Movement have a duty of solidarity (and perhaps, on occasion of criticism) and one of cooperation and of both receiving and offering counsel and suggestion but no duty and no right to seek to export programmes, priorities, personnel and leadership to Africa. Africa and Africans have suffered and still suffer from too much domination - whether

overtly, by coercive 'advice' or by more subtle methods - from outsiders (not excluding Christianity and Churches) for any such approach to be practically viable any more than it would be morally sound.

Clearly one comparative advantage of northern Churches lies on the international economic context and external resource support requirements of African employment generation strategies. Equally at least some Asian and Latin American Churches can provide insights into how Churches can engage in reflection, direct action, dialogue and mobilisation on economic issues including employment. Both may be able to make Africans and African Churches concerns more widely and effectively heard and to engage in dialogue on different contextual aspects of employment in the light of the Gospel message. They need to reflect on these points and to bear them in mind when confronting employment/unemployment challenges in their own countries. But, just as intellectual and theological leadership in Europe must and should come primarily from Europeans, so in Africa it must and should come primarily from Africans.

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