

DISCUSSION PAPER

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**Sub-Saharan Africa: poverty of
development, development of poverty**
by Reginald Herbold Green

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AGRICULTURE AND RURAL PROBLEMS/PUBLIC POLICY

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:

POVERTY OF DEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPMENT OF POVERTY

by

Reginald Herbold Green

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The human and political economic history of sub-Saharan Africa is one of evolving and developing poverty and hunger - a process highlighted by the sub-continent's disastrous 1979-83 experience and weak subsequent stabilisation. The 'loud crisis' of the early 1980s has led to two main responses: the new conventional wisdom of stabilisation and structural adjustment and the expanded old immediate response of emergency survival assistance. Both - separately or together - are incomplete and almost certainly, inadequate to the task of attaining development which overcomes poverty. The former is too abstractedly macro and fails either to treat human investment and immediate welfare seriously or to recognise that production and distribution are basically co-determined, not sequential. The latter is too episodic and too little oriented to tackling a series of challenges to survival as the first steps toward rehabilitation and development. Arguably elements for reformulating and building from each (and both) toward a short and medium term political economic strategy to overcome poverty through development are 'Within African Reach'.

Contents

	Page
I. Introduction	1
Persistent, Developing Poverty	3
II. Transitions From Poverty To Poverty: An Historical Perspective	5
1960-79: Development by Modernisation	7
1979-19???: The Resurgence of Poverty	9
Economic Contraction - Human Misery	9
III. The Topography Of Poverty And Hunger	10
Shifting Patterns	13
IV. Stabilisation, Structural Adjustment and Poverty	14
Production/Distribution - Interaction vs Separation	15
Public Accounts Balancing: By What Means?	16
Liberalisation For Whom?	18
V. Toward Broadening The Formulation Of Structural Adjustment?	19
Limitations of Success	21
VI. Within African Reach?	22
Survival: What Next?	23
Toward The Longer Term	25
Focus On Food	26
And Basic Services	27
Accountability, Participation And Production	30
VII. A Valedictory Note	32
Table 1	33
Notes	35
References	41

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POVERTY

Reginald Herbold Green

Sweet and cloying through the dark air
Falls the stifling scent of despair;
The forms take shape in the dark air:
Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear
Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyena waiting
For laughter, laughter, laughter. The Lords of hell
are here.

- T. S. Eliot

What do you want to be when you grow up?
Alive.

- UNICEF African Poster 1985

Do not go gentle into that good night...
But rage rage against the dying of the light.

- Dylan Thomas

I. Introduction

The struggle against poverty and for human conditions of life by and for poor people is neither a new one, limited to the poor countries of the South nor a static one. Participation in it, from the Temple Commission on UK unemployment in the 1930s through the early days of the United Nations' economic development effort beginning at the end of the 1940s, and the International Labour Organisation's World Employment Programme in the 1970s to his present service with UNICEF, has been an abiding and integral part of Hans Singer's devotion to applied economics as a vocation - economics in its original Old Testament sense of stewardship and meeting material needs.^{1/} Nor is Hans a newcomer to Africa - from the founding of the Economic Commission for Africa as the 1950s turned into the 1960s, through the 1970s Kenya ILO Employment Mission to the 1984 UNICEF State of the World's Children Report and study of the impact of the depression on children in Africa (Singer and Green, 1984) there is a span of 25 years of work.

Over that period sub-Saharan Africa has become independent; begun to grapple with both poverty and productivity; appeared to achieve (in a majority of states) a real if limited and imperfect development momentum; and, since the end of the 1970s, fallen into sustained economic unsuccess in all but a small minority of countries.^{2/}

That unsuccess has usually been sketched in terms of macroeconomic or political-economic aggregate levels and trends (for example in World Bank, World Development Reports and in the bulk of the contributions to the sources cited in fn. 2) and flashed on television screens in images of mass starvation. The first abstracts from, and anaesthetises against, the human meaning of economic disintegration - penury, hunger, illness, plague, societal breakdown (at least the outriders and forward projected shadows of the four horsemen of the apocalypse). The latter numbs by its hammer blows of horror and creates a situation in which the struggle to meet the immediate necessity of maintaining life can push aside the need to alter the conditions which in their extreme form endanger life on a mass basis, but in their more general and more persistent manifestations erode, degrade and shorten it in less dramatic but no less damnable ways.

The reactions to economic unsuccess in sub-Saharan Africa have been dominated by two lines:

- a. the 'new conventional wisdom'^{3/} centred on IMF stabilisation and World Bank structural adjustment models; and
- b. the emergency famine relief focus on keeping human beings alive.

The need to balance resources used with resources available - stabilisation - is irrefutable. No economy can avoid stabilisation indefinitely and multi-term, massive imbalance leads to conditions at least as deadly to human welfare as to GDP growth. The basic questions are ones of distribution of costs, timing and - most critical - the relevant roles of cutting resource use versus increasing domestic (produced) and external (transferred) resource supply. Similarly, structural adjustment to raise production and productivity generally, and in particular to improve the balance of external resources and food availability relative to requirements, is not itself controversial. Especially in very poor countries, even though growth without development is all too possible development without growth is not. However, it is not the same thing to affirm that production is essential and to encapsulate that advice as 'Seek ye first the kingdom of production and all else shall be added unto you'. There are very real questions of distribution (dominantly turning on who is able to produce what, not on subsequent transfer payments), of basic service levels (both in respect to minimum humanly acceptable standards and to ability to produce) and of timing of gains as opposed to costs (poor people have very narrow survival margins and it is a brutal fact that the poor are dead in the short, not even the long, run).

The emergency efforts to avoid mass death do relate to an immediate overriding necessity. For the dead there is no

future. By themselves they do not answer what one is keeping people alive for in the sense of what they will be able to make of their lives. Mass starvation in sub-Saharan Africa to date has been triggered by the interaction of drought, weak transport systems and war (and threatened, albeit to date averted, when the first two interacted particularly savagely).

But it has been triggered both because the margin between 'normal' food supply and starvation is narrow, and increasingly narrowing in a majority of the region's countries, and because most poor households have neither the self employment nor wage employment opportunity either to grow enough to eat or to be productive and well rewarded enough to buy adequate food. In normal years inability to buy food - not its physical scarcity - is the main cause of urban malnutrition (cf. Reutlinger 1985). That reality underlies the famine crises and remains even when reasonable rains return (see Please 1985; Green 1985b) - as they did in many, not all, drought affected areas in the 1984-85 cropping seasons. Furthermore, peasants who have lost herds, tools, seed and other means of farming, especially if also driven from their homes into urban areas or relief camps by the search for food cannot resume production as if nothing had happened. Flight from the land will be both difficult and slow (cf. Burki 1985).

Persistent, Developing Poverty

Neither of these two approaches directly addresses the challenge of persistent and developing poverty. Even when many sub-Saharan Africa economies had positive per capita output growth not reversed by negative terms of trade shifts, absolute poverty at best declined slowly as a proportion of total population and even then often rose in absolute numbers of human beings affected. Similarly, basic service expansion while very real is - with the partial exception of primary education - very far from achieving universal access in most SSA states. In SSA the extent of malnutrition defined as not enough calories for an active working life rose in 1980 to 44 per cent of the population - 150 mn human beings - while 25 per cent (90 mn) were also below the calories needed to avert stunted growth and serious health risk. Both the percentages and the absolute numbers represented deterioration since 1970 (World Bank 1986; Reutlinger 1985). The 1970s concerns with employment (for example the World Employment Programme's country teams such as the one to Kenya), peasant productivity, the 'informal sector', basic service access, distribution and enabling the poor to become less poor by producing more (or being more fairly paid), related to very real human and economic problems. They self-evidently remain valid in the 1980s as absolute poverty rises and basic services decay, even if the somewhat reductionist emphasis on productivity and survival has for the time being swept them to the margins of dialogue and - with exceptions - of resource allocation. The concern with persistent poverty is not a new one in economics

nor one associated solely with particular ideologies. It was, after all, Adam Smith who made it a premise that no nation could be great and prosperous if the majority of its people were poor and miserable.

The weakness of conventional stabilisation and structural adjustment strategies is not their focus on regaining balance between resource availability and use, still less their insistence on the need to increase and to alter the makeup of production to achieve and to sustain balance. It is the absence of two additional priorities which is open to question. These are:

- a. non-deferral of meeting basic needs - with special reference to food, water, health and education;
- b. priority to increasing productivity of and access to services by poor people and vulnerable groups.

There is no reason to assume that these goals are either economic or socio political nonsense. The enormous cost of inadequate diet in terms of health, ability to benefit from education, capacity to work hard in lost present and future output terms is increasingly widely recognised (cf. Reutlinger 1985; World Bank 1986; UNICEF 1985b). Similarly, the social disintegration and political instability caused by the immiserisation of growing numbers of people who were formerly productive, non-destitute members of their societies and economies has high potential economic costs; active in the cases of disorder and insurrection, passive in those of retreat from involvement in state policy and reversion to an 'each for himself and the devil take the hindmost' variant of economic and social neo-anarchy.

The weaknesses of emergency relief efforts are rather different. They do recognise that basic needs cannot be deferred and that helping human beings stay alive matters. What they have failed to do in the past is to pose two further questions:

- a. how can these people have a future - and what kind of one - after their lives have been saved?
- b. how can emergency aid be designed and utilised as a first step toward self re-establishment including increased/restored production/earned income by the recipients?

Bob Geldof's horrified comments on the need to consider what Band Aid was keeping people alive for (i.e. what human condition they faced) illustrates the growing concern with the first question. The second has been nibbled at both by analysts and practitioners but main line action remains to treat it as unhandleable because emergencies are unpredictable, time short and relief logically separable from

development.

II. Transitions From Poverty To Poverty: An Historical Perspective

Poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is an historic fact - as it is virtually universally. There was no golden age before the Europeans came when the land flowed with sorghum, millet and yams, with guinea fowl, cattle and fish, with palm oil, groundnuts and garden eggs, with banana beer, coconut spirits and palm wine so that all were well fed and prosperous. But it would be equally false to treat poverty as primordial, unchanging and - implicitly - permanently immutable and inevitable.

Pre-colonial poverty turned primarily on sub-marginal or erratic rainfall and on technological (and therefore productivity) limitations in relation to sub-Saharan Africa's poor and difficult soils. The human condition was equally constrained by inadequate health knowledge, practices and services which shortened life and eroded strength. Africans, not Europeans, have always been the chief victims of African diseases and so-called adult African resistance to, for example, malaria often means no more (and no less) than that vulnerable individuals died of it as children.

None of this denies that Africans did develop technologies: some long fallow rotation systems (so-called 'shifting cultivation') related admirably and sustainably to poor soils with limited, uncertain rainfall so long as populations were small and the only large demand on the land was for food; some herbal and para-psychological medical practices were far more than common sense or trial and error. Still less does it deny cultural and social achievements. The fact remains that for many Africans hunger was an annual occurrence, disease a frequent one, life short, and death an ever present danger unleashed by unpredictable and technologically unmanageable weather shifts and outbreaks of disease.

Pre-colonial neo-colonialism - of slave traders and merchants manipulating African politics and agents - unleashed two additional causes of poverty and human misery. The first was the slave trade and the social and economic wastelands it created (still writ plain in the low present population of most of Nigeria's middle belt almost a century after that trade ceased). The second was the rise in the number and ferocity of wars - and the killing power available to armies - largely directly or indirectly triggered by European and, secondarily, Arabian interventions (see Rodney 1972).

Colonialism in Africa rarely meant territorial economic development even in modern macroeconomic terms. Gross territorial product - as opposed to certain products of use to the colonising power and its trading partners - was rarely of

central concern. James Mill's definition of a colony as a place in which the colonising power found it convenient to carry out some of its business (e.g. mining, cutting tropical timber, buying or growing tropical crops) provides much more insight into the nature of economic policy than any definition presupposing that colonies were seen primarily as territorial economic units in their own right.^{4/}

As a direct result, African poverty was not an economic concern which could appear on the colonial agenda as more than a footnote. A large export sector with a supporting food and service sector could on occasion reduce poverty - a result not unwelcome to many colonial administrators. Avoiding mass starvation (by price juggling, reserve holding, famine relief and even food for work policies which have a haunting familiarity of kind if not scale to 1970s and 1980s efforts) were sometimes priorities - e.g. in the then Tanganyika Mandate - and did end mass starvation. But Adam Smith's dictum on the need for the majority to be non-poor and non-miserable as a pre-condition for colonial economic success would have been either incomprehensible or seen as at least as subversive as the writings of Karl Marx.^{5/}

Education for Africans was perceived either as a by-product of missionary endeavour (vaguely backed, tolerated or curtailed in terms of its supposed social and political impact - which was usually far more and far more deeply 'subversive' than colonial administrators, or missionaries!, realised) or as an investment in clerks, semi-skilled labour and other human intermediate inputs into the colonial economy. The calculations were not in sophisticated econometric terms, but colonial education policy was early (and severely cost constrained) human resource development school in concept - even when it flowered to secondary and medical assistant levels. Health facilities for Africans (and until late in the colonial period often for Europeans^{6/}) were even more exiguous and dependent on missionary subsidisation of the colonial state.

However, the nature of poverty changed. Colonial rule did reduce death from war (caused by dislocation and subsequent starvation or epidemic disease more than by battle casualties); it did end the slave trade; frequently it did provide fail-safe famine relief against mass starvation. These shifts probably both increased life expectancy and (by reducing dislocation) raised rates of increase of food production. Exploitative as it was, colonial production promotion/coercion on average probably raised the command of many African households over goods and services. While there were exceptions (especially in the case of settler colonies), the territories in which most Africans were most likely to be poor and miserable were those like then Haute Volta in which, a la Joan Robinson's formulation, the colonial power and its enterprises could find no worthwhile way of exploiting them.

Poverty - or at least human deprivation - was also altered in its nature in additional ways. The first was the imposition of external rule with its impact on polity, society, self image and self set standards - clearly a negative shift. The second was the beginnings of education and health services which both improved the human condition of recipients and gave them - and other Africans - a fuller picture of what they were (for whatever reason) still deprived of. The third was an increase in population growth (presumably related to the indirect effects of law and order including famine relief and ability to produce more) which began to create pressure on land of plausible quality and security of rainfall (most severely where colonists or plantations had reduced the supply available). This trend was probably not very significant in most areas at the time but laid the foundations for much more generalised and severe problems over the last 20 years.

1960-79: Development by Modernisation

Development - or at least growth and expansion of both production and basic services - speeded up in the region as a whole and in most sub-Saharan economies over the two decades after independence. The dominant basic pattern was arguably a more intensive colonial mise en valeur emphasis on modernisation and expansion of selected output sub-sectors and related infrastructure, paralleled by more intensive and extensive human resource investment oriented education, and rather more attention to health and water supply. However at least one sectoral addition - import substitution industry, one sub-sectoral shift - toward high capital intensity irrigated and mechanised agriculture and one perspective shift - to see an African state as a self contained unit for policy purposes (not an appendage of a broader unit centred abroad) were increasingly evident over time.

Output per capita and service provision coverage did rise (see World Bank 1981). The advance was uneven - the least favoured countries in natural resource or location terms and those with chronic policy failures did not share significantly in it - slow and unstable, but real. Ironically on average the best four years were 1976-79, the recovery following the 1973-75 shocks and preceeding the 1980-85 debacle (see sources in fn. 2).

Poverty defined as low income household ability to meet basic consumption needs was neither rapidly nor consistently reduced. The basic cause was a failure of wages and reasonably productive self employment to rise much - if at all - more rapidly than population plus a failure of productivity increases to become accessible to the poorest quarter to half of peasant households. Basic service accessibility did rise, albeit often so slowly that absolute numbers without access rose, even though a growing share of the people was served.

While mass starvation was - with very rare exceptions - averted, it is doubtful that seasonal, cyclical and endemic hunger were reduced markedly. From about 1965 on food, and from 1970 overall, agricultural production growth lagged behind that of population - a source of subsequent immiseration on three counts: increasing inability to meet domestic food requirements from domestic production; falling per household cash income from sale of food or other crops; and falling export earnings and therefore ability to sustain overall capacity utilisation and maintenance or growth in the early and middle 1970s and more especially since 1979.

The reasons for agricultural malaise are complex, are not clearly understood (especially in terms of weight and interaction) and until the 1980s had very distinct divergences from country to country. In respect to poor farmers three stand out: concentration of resources in ways which left the small, isolated farmer with a low initial income unable to raise output; increasing population/land ratios and static proven knowledge (and access to inputs), leading to smaller holdings, more intensive land use unsustainable under existing systems, pushing on to poorer and/or higher weather-risk land. As these households usually produce primarily domestic food crops (with sales for cash a deduction from what are often already at least marginally inadequate self provisioning) and effective domestic food prices after 1960 did not in general show a cyclical fall relative to wages, there is some doubt how significant peasant/worker terms of trade shifts and state price policy (rarely effective for domestic food crops) were directly, except for the minority who produced export crops which clearly did suffer from world and domestic terms of trade shifts and increases in (public and also private) marketing costs relative to export prices.

While still representing only a small proportion of total absolutely poor households, urban poverty (in low productivity informal sector self or wage employment) began to grow very rapidly. Whether the urban absolutely poor households were much less poor than the poorest half of peasant households in physical consuming power terms^{7/} is unclear and probably varied sharply among countries. What they did have was somewhat better access to basic services and a far higher chance of winning their way out of absolute poverty than most of the poorer half of peasant households.

In the 1970s concern about low growth of employment and of rural household incomes led to a substantial employment, technology, urban renewal and rural development studies industry and some pilot projects,^{8/} most destined to fall victim to post 1979 increases in resource stringency. Likewise concern over low food production growth led to increased real resource (including infrastructural investment and marketing working capital), institutional and policy attention to this sub-sector, often with attention diverted away from poor households and in most cases with no very

evident net positive impact on production.^{9/} Finally, the late 1960s/early 1970s falling off of growth and the negative 1974-75 growth during the first external shock crises led (during the 1976-79 high growth period) to a set of studies which formed the basis of the new conventional wisdom on stabilisation and structural adjustment, appearing as they did after the 1960-79 development dynamic had gone into reverse in almost all of sub-Saharan Africa.

1979 - 19???: The Resurgence of Poverty

Since 1979 the general performance of the region's economies has been disastrous. The combination of negative per capita physical output growth, falling external terms of trade and declining net external resource inflows (absolutely as well as per capita) have reduced real per capita command over resources to below 1970 levels for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.^{10/} The World Bank's optimistic projections suggest no regional real output per capita recovery over 1985-95 and possibly some further deterioration on net per capita inflows and terms of trade (World Bank 1984).

On what has caused this massive shift of direction there is substantial agreement that external shocks (including weather), narrow margins for riding them out and the cumulative impact of over a decade and a half of agricultural failure were major factors. There is also agreement that government policies were not optimal (not that they had been over 1960-79 either) and were adjusted to contextual disasters too slowly and that for some polities civil war/state disintegration and/or external aggression, which - e.g. - cost the nine SADCC states about \$10,000 mn over 1980/84 or well over total external resource inflows for the period (SADCC 1985), were also decisive causes. The specific weights of particular causes (and especially their interaction and their applicability to specific countries) are not agreed (see Allison and Green, 1985 and sources at fn. 2) nor are the directions in which policies erred (as opposed to fairly pervasive overambition in scope and underperformance in practice).

Economic Contraction - Human Misery

The impact of economic contraction on poor people has not been analysed consistently, comprehensively or coherently. For this there are at least four reasons:

1. social and human condition indicators are not as widely, uniformly, regularly or carefully estimated as more narrowly economic ones so that data is usually fragmentary, of doubtful inter temporal or intra country comparability and even less accurate than that in macroeconomic estimates;

2. structural changes - e.g. the apparent rise in the proportion of secondary and informal incomes, especially among the urban poor - have not been mapped empirically, rendering many indicators either dated or based on implausible assumptions;
3. there is a lag between economic contraction and clear downturns in some indicators - especially those (e.g. education, health) where quality may fall drastically while quantity is still rising - and a further lag until data are collected, published and analysed (e.g. infant mortality estimates based on intercensal comparisons tend to be up to a decade behind current reality and to mask shifts in trend between censuses);
4. overriding macroeconomic and human survival (anti-starvation) - and in some cases state survival - concerns have pushed analysis of, as well as action on, human condition indicators into the background. Indeed when it is felt that nothing can be done to halt their decline (or that economic recovery is both necessary and sufficient for reversing that decline) there is a distinct desire 'not to know'.

Thus in 1984 UNICEF's Impact Of World Recession On Children was able to produce a broad array of suggestive and scattered empirical data but not a set of statistics comparable to those in the World Bank's annual World Development Reports. This was especially true for sub-Saharan Africa (see Singer and Green, 1984). The annual Statistics On Children In UNICEF Assisted Countries (UNICEF 1985) illustrates the fragmentary nature of relevant data (and the three-year time lag for attaining even some global coverage).

III. The Topography of Poverty And Hunger

But a number of main topographical elements of the development of poverty can be drawn. Food production per capita is still declining secularly - and in the early 1980s was severely cyclically affected by a drought belt extending from the Cape Verdes through the Sahel to the Sudan and down through the Horn and East Africa to the Cape and back to the Atlantic coasts of Namibia and Angola. The officially estimated ratio of average calorie availability relative to basic requirements fell to 80 per cent in many cases and under 70 per cent in some - a chilling figure when one realises that it means that at least half the human beings in these countries have still less food than that.^{12/} What micro data exist suggest that the farmers hardest hit fall into several sub-groups:

- a. victims of sustained drought and/or ecological degradation whose previous sources of income (including herds, seed stock, land improvements) have been wiped

out;

- b. the - usually poor, often female headed - households pushed by land hunger onto more marginal (in terms of soil, weather, ecological fragility) land - i.e. the pioneers of the 'rural sponge' effect which has to date limited the rise of open unemployment;
- c. households in isolated or peripheral (to main urban centres) areas who tend to be physically and institutionally (including for private enterprise) at the end of the line for all goods and services and to suffer first and most severely from decreased flow levels;
- d. small producers - usually primarily engaged in self provisioning but also selling food, even if in nutritional terms they have a deficit,^{13/} because it is their basic source of cash income - who are unable to increase or even sustain output in the face of static applicable knowledge and declining access to inputs.

Effective food prices have risen relative to wages and usually to prices, but for the groups cited this does little or no good because of stagnant or falling output. Non-food crop prices have tended to fall in real terms - often dramatically - partly relating to terms of trade internationally, partly to currency overvaluation and partly to rising marketing costs. This has probably affected poor peasants less severely for two reasons: many non-food crop producers are not among the poorest peasant households; and switches from non-food to food crops by poor peasant households have been particularly marked (at least in some areas). However, there are poor peasant households presently or formerly primarily dependent on non-food crops for cash income who have been severely affected including (e.g. in Northern and Upper Ghana) by having to sell more of their already inadequate food production.

Formal recorded wage employment in the region as a whole has been nearly static since 1979. Meanwhile real wages have fallen sharply - often to the point at which second and third incomes are essential to household survival. As open unemployment is not common - only those who are not absolutely poor or can depend on relatives can afford to be unemployed - this implies a rapid growth in informal sector self and non-recorded wage employment. Here too there was clearly a 'sponge effect' in the 1970s, but one which appears to be running into productivity and market limits in the 1980s, at least for most young, uneducated and female informal sector members.

Public service provision has fallen. The basic reasons are budgetary stringency (with falls in real expenditure levels on health, education and water common and draconic ones not uncommon) and foreign exchange shortages (leading to missing drugs, pump spares, textbooks, transport, etc). In some cases

quantity of services has fallen markedly - e.g. rural health in Zambia and Ghana. In more, quality has declined, e.g. generalised shortages of school and medical service materials and maintenance. Supply and/or useability of nominally available services is severely constrained (e.g. on average 25 per cent of rural water supply units in Tanzania are out of service at any one time because of missing spares or fuel).

The decline in services has pressed particularly hard on end of the line areas - isolated rural districts and urban slums - and on those with rapidly growing populations, again especially urban slums but also some resettlement schemes. Or, more accurately, it has pressed particularly heavily on the poor people living in them. The rise of private primary schools and clinics in poor urban areas does indeed indicate that poor Africans value these services, but also that the state-supplied ones are less and less available and/or more and more unsatisfactory.

Raising or reintroducing fees for basic services has had a negative effect on access of the poor to health and education, but how much is unclear. This is true because there is no uniform pattern of fee levels (in some cases they are probably progressive relative to income but not in others), waiver possibilities and collection levels and because their supposed use to restore or sustain service levels is not to date very evident.

The most recent life expectancy and mortality data suggest that the health service cuts may - in several cases - have halted or reversed the slow improvement of life expectancy and decline of infant mortality trends which characterised sub-Saharan Africa over 1960-79. More dramatically, diseases nearly eradicated in the late 1950s and 1960s (e.g. yaws and yellow fever in Ghana) have erupted at epidemic levels and remained endemic because lack of funds and transport have limited counter campaigns. Moderate and severe child malnutrition has reached levels of 30 per cent or above in most countries for which data exist and is approaching 50 per cent in some, even excluding famine crisis years (UNICEF 1985 and selected UNICEF country situation reports).

Meanwhile traditional security systems have been eroded - probably a trend well established in the 1960-79 period but much more nakedly evident since. Kinship and locality or origin groups are less able to support poor members/relatives - especially in urban areas and rural areas affected by natural or other disasters. This is not simply a result of shifts toward less extended families and urban residence, relevant as these are. With economic contraction, fewer and fewer group members have resources (especially of cash or food) to spare - all boats are sinking lower. Similarly higher cost, less available transport reduces urban/rural kin and migrant contacts. Reciprocal exchange - food for manufactures - has probably risen, but this is not an avenue

accessible to the very poor. To exchange one must have something above day to day subsistence (including the cost of a trip) to start.

Shifting Patterns

The pattern and balance of absolute poverty have continued to shift. The worst declines - excluding drought/war related famines - appear to have been among urban poor (including for the first time a high proportion of recorded wage employees). In consuming power terms they are now clearly worse off than the majority of peasants and their former advantages in respect to access to basic services and to chances of advancing to higher real incomes are increasingly exiguous. Rural absolute poverty has grown unevenly, with the general rule of thumb being that households in peripheral areas - geographically, politically, in absolute agricultural potential or in perceived^{14/} commercialised production - have fared worse on production and service access quite apart from being particularly prone to drought and civil government collapse and war debacles.

It is still true that the majority of sub-Saharan Africa's poorest of the poor are in refugee camps and peripheral rural areas, but there is now a rapidly growing urban household category which is almost equally immiserised. In most of the region's economies the net resource flow - at existing prices - is urban to rural, as much in states with an urban bias as in the minority with a rural policy bias. Oddly the clearest exceptions are two Stabilisation/Structural Adjustment cases, Ghana and Uganda, which are almost alone in having very high export crop taxes. In respect to non-food crops it can be claimed that price distortions hide a true rural to urban flow, but with both the trend and the post 1979 realignment of food crop prices in favour of producers over wage earners it is hard to argue the same for that sub-sector. This does not, however, mean equal access to basic services for rural areas, because state revenues from rural households and producers are much lower than from mineral and urban so that expenditure proportional to revenue results in substantially higher per capita spending and service provision in urban areas (and for both rural and urban elites).

Table 1 sets out the present levels of several Human Condition or Quality of Life indicators for Low Income Sub-Saharan Africa as of 1982 and their evolution in Ghana over 1960-84. The absolute levels are appalling enough but their evolution in Ghana is even more dispiriting. Moderately rapid real gains in the 1960s slowed down in the 1970s and have now gone into reverse. Two immediate basic causal inadequacies stand out - food production and the budgetary base for health and education. While Ghana's period of economic unsuccess dates to the early 1960s, not 1979, the record of change on the Human Condition front does not appear atypical. What was hard

won over two decades has been undermined, eroded and threatened with being totally swept away in seven years. The stifling scent of despair is there - not universally, not unconditionally but widely and increasingly.

IV. Stabilisation, Structural Adjustment and Poverty

Neither stabilisation nor structural adjustment is an economic approach usually asserted to attack poverty directly. On the other hand proponents argue each is an essential step to create the conditions within which poverty reduction is attainable and - less uniformly - that by reducing economic distortions and scarcities taken together they will automatically alter income distribution in favour of poor people. Experience to date neither contradicts nor supports the first contention but raises severe questions as to the second. Logic does - at least for sub-Saharan Africa - support the first but in no general sense the second proposition.

Conceptually - and indeed in practice - stabilisation and structural adjustment are not the same thing. Stabilisation necessarily comprises restoration of internal and external economic balance but may or may not include changes in the structure of production or distribution and may or may not imply future growth (or, indeed, steady contraction as in the 1975-79 Rhodesian stabilisation policy). Indeed one criticism of many IMF stabilisation programmes (not only in SSA) has been that they achieved 'stabilisation without adjustment' through cutting resource use to regain balance but leaving economic structures unchanged so that attempts to restore output and restart growth more or less automatically 'restored' imbalance.

Structural adjustment relates to basic alterations in the patterns of production and resource allocation. In practice it is seen as being linked to restoring or sustaining economic growth. There is no reason why structural adjustment should be undertaken only after severe economic imbalance has built up - sensible policy would be to adjust structurally to avert such imbalance.

Nigeria's present austerity programme with its massive cuts in imports, real state spending, domestic production and real wages to restore external account balance, limit government borrowing and restore external debt service, appears to be a genuine policy of adjustment without any clear structural adjustment strategy to allow renewed development once balance is restored. Similarly Botswana's new five year plan represents an attempt to set in process a programme or trend toward structural adjustment before the relative stagnation of present leading production and export sectors leads to serious economic imbalance.

However, in SSA today stabilisation/structural adjustment are usually seen as the two halves of a single package, or two steps in a continuous process. This is true for two basic reasons: first, in a majority of SSA economies very severe imbalances do exist and stabilisation is necessary; second, World Bank/bilateral structural adjustment programme support (and/or design) has been conditioned on prior agreement of a stabilisation programme with the IMF.

Setting aside some serious technical questions about the design of short term IMF stabilisation programmes in the context of longer term structural imbalances requiring physical structural adjustment (Green 1985d), stabilisation/structural adjustment as preached to and in sub-Saharan Africa has three main features:

- a. enhancement of production, exports and productivity;
- b. reduction of government financing requirements (recurrent deficit plus investment financing) relative to Gross Domestic Product;
- c. liberalisation in the specific sense of reduction of public sector directly productive and commercial activity and redirecting market intervention in favour of 'efficient' enterprises and sectors.^{15/}

Enhancement of production - especially food and basic consumer manufactured goods production - is necessary if absolute poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is to be reduced rapidly. Quite apart from social, political, ecological and incentive limits to redistribution, even present levels of per capita output, however distributed - much less a continued trend decline - would not allow all sub-Saharan Africans to escape from absolute poverty. Increasing exports - which have fallen secularly relative to GDP - is essential both to operate and to maintain existing productive capacity and to finance structural adjustment of production patterns as well as (via general increases in consumption and incomes) to restore real government revenue to allow basic service restoration. Raising productivity is critical to enhancement of real incomes (and/or to avoiding state subsidies which indirectly comes to the same thing at macro - though not necessarily at micro - economic level) - not least for poor peasant farmers and non-agricultural informal sector workers.

Production/Distribution - Interaction vs Separation

But structural adjustment as preached and - slightly less uniformly - as practised either abstracts from issues of distribution or views present above average production/productivity as evidence of high potential for enhanced production, justifying preferential resource allocations (including by relative price shifts). These two

features do create a bias against the poor - and one not necessarily consistent with economic efficiency narrowly defined.

Distribution patterns - spatially, sectorally, by social group and by sub-class - are primarily determined by who produces what, where, by what technology, under what production relations. This is not a new nor a radical economic proposition. It is as central to the analysis of Adam Smith and David Ricardo as to that of Karl Marx. It is particularly true in poor economies such as those of sub-Saharan Africa in which post initial distribution fiscal redistribution in the form of state social security or other consumer transfer payment is - necessarily - very much smaller both absolutely and relative to GDP than in middle or high income economies. If most of the poor people of sub-Saharan Africa are to become less poor they need to be enabled to produce more - i.e. in peasant agricultural and informal (small scale) non-agricultural activity. In general there is no evidence that such a concentration of resources would reduce growth rates at micro or sectoral levels - on balance au contraire 16/ - and it would almost certainly reduce the incremental import/output rates which should allow greater growth at macroeconomic level.

If potential for increased production - particularly in respect to peasant agriculture - is identified on the basis of above average present individual or area performance, then a clear bias against the poor is introduced. It is also one not necessarily consistent with economic logic - incremental resources should yield higher returns when added to initially particularly resource deprived units and/or complementing existing inputs (e.g. labour) unless the point is that to allocate broadly will result in such small incremental resource flows to any one unit as to be below the minimum critical size for any output gain at all.

Public Accounts Balancing: By What Means?

Reducing government borrowing requirements is not a goal in itself. It is a means to bringing resource demand and supply into balance. Imbalance - at least extreme imbalance as existing in many sub-Saharan Africa economies whether defined in terms of inflation, absolute poverty or capacity underutilisation - does create distortions which tend to weigh particularly heavily on poor, politically weak and vulnerable groups (or sub-classes). Reducing government borrowing requirements can be achieved by increasing revenue and/or cutting expenditure not beneficial to the poor (e.g. some aspects of administration and security services^{17/} or subsidies oriented to upper or middle income groups).

However, in practice most structural adjustment programmes - whether nationally designed or based on IMF and World Bank

advice - have tended to concentrate on reducing borrowing by cutting real government and public enterprise recurrent and capital expenditure. Within that frame expenditure cuts have not necessarily been biased against basic services sectors^{18/} but have not in general been designed to protect them. And within those sectors the mechanics of cutting have left capital intensive units with disproportionate levels of staff and limited access, so that those services most critical to the poor have suffered disproportionately.^{19/}

This bias is increased by cost recovery approaches concentrating on basic services. It is not clear that user charges to deter overprovision are needed in sub-Saharan Africa - nobody really contends that either quality or quantity of basic services is adequate. Nor on standard Treasury grounds of certainty, ease of collectability and cost/revenue ratio are primary school fees, charges for anti-diarrhoeal salts and vaccinations nor standpipe water superior to either general or amenity consumer goods sales tax increases - quite the reverse in most cases. Nor, given the rather tenuous observable connection between imposition of such charges and improvement of services, are they likely to be a very acceptable form of tax unless locally controlled and earmarked as to use - an approach which may have some potential but has not figured prominently in stabilisation or structural adjustment programmes.

If such charges are at low levels and can be waived at point of service provision for those too poor to pay, they may not be a major factor in restricting access. The Christian medical services in Ghana and state primary schools in Tanzania do appear to have achieved that type of fee pattern (at the price of very erratic and unpredictable collection in the Tanzanian case) but it is by no means clear that access constricting effects are in general equally limited.

Charges on services going largely to higher income groups or which carry direct and rapid economic benefits to recipients may need examination with a view to increased charges if collection procedures and costs are manageable. Examples include above average room and board in hospitals; specialised high cost medical services; household piped water connections; passenger car licences; drivers licences; university and other tertiary education.

In some of these cases - e.g. water - higher charges for above average income users are practicable and can be used to cross-subsidise low income - e.g. standpipe or communal tap - users. However, in others - e.g. higher education - higher fees and lower bursaries are not necessarily a preferable solution to restraining salary levels or increasing the progressivity of income taxes.

This bias against providing physically and economically accessible basic services to poor people, like that in

distribution of production - is open to challenge on production as well as human grounds. The sick, the illiterate and those tired from long hours collecting water are not able to work long, hard and productively. Those physically or mentally handicapped in infancy, childhood or youth by lack of medical care and/or malnutrition, as well as those unable to develop their productive skills through lack of access to education, are a drag on future productive potential.

Liberalisation in stabilisation and adjustment does not mean laissez faire for three reasons. First, nobody really believes that sub-Saharan Africa economies could move to, for example, free floating exchange rates and no import licensing at one go, nor that there is no role for public enterprises to play. Second, selective and phased reduction of 'distortions' requires monitoring to prevent the net result being greater distortion, not less. The debate is over which distortions, what monitoring, which controls. Third, stabilisation and structural adjustment policies are selectively interventionist quite as much as the policies their architects criticise. Deliberate holding down of nominal wages (reducing real wages) while raising agricultural prices and interest rates does not constitute neutrality nor is it even an approximation of allowing unregulated market price determination. Nor does advice to raise salaries sharply and minimum wages marginally constitute reliance on the market. Market forces might or might not²⁰ produce similar results, the point is that what structural adjustment is doing is to intervene directly not to allow market determination, presumably on the same assumption of market imperfections as previous policies - though with different goals.

Reduction in the scope of public sector enterprises is argued on mixed grounds of over-extension leading to generalised inefficiency justifying cutbacks whether the private sector steps in or not, specific greater private sector efficiency in particular cases and general assertions of public enterprises' 'inherent' low economic efficiency.

Liberalisation For Whom?

Liberalisation - in the sense of reducing bureaucratic regulation and market intervention in favour of or against specific sectors, sub-classes, groups, enterprises or individuals - is not necessarily against the interests of the poor. African government departments and public enterprises clearly are spread too thin; selective cutbacks on non-essentials could increase the efficiency of basic service and commercial service/basic goods production. Preferential resource allocations often favour the rich, the powerful and those close to decision takers (by location, kinship or sub-class). Regulations are harder for the poor to comprehend and follow (or to bribe their way around) and distortions harder for them to exploit than for the non-poor. Many

interventions are now - whatever their intent or pre-1980 impact - clearly ineffective, cross cancelling or counterproductive.

But the specific liberalisations proposed do tend to be biased against the poor as, more generally, are markets under the conditions of rigidity and structural imbalance which characterise sub-Saharan Africa. Compressing real wages, cutting government services, concentrating public (or successor private) enterprise activity on the most profitable bits of business ('picking the eyes out of it' in, e.g. transport or crop purchasing) are most certainly not neutral between poor peasants and workers and less poor farmers and businessmen. There is no equally general case that they are efficient in production enhancing terms.

V. Toward Broadening The Formulation Of Structural Adjustment?

At this level the argument would appear to imply that Structural Adjustment - even resting on its present tripod of production, state borrowing reduction and selective liberalisation (or redirection of intervention) could have positive implications for poor sub-Saharan Africans and that the first (production) leg is a necessary condition for such gains. However, it would appear equally true that most current programmes have unnecessary built-in biases against the poor. Since these costs come early in the adjustment process and the gains from enhanced production later, the temporal pattern is to require the poor to accept high, certain initial costs for lagged, uncertain gains - a pattern inconsistent with their margins above survival or their life expectancy.21/

There is another - complementary - way of approaching the interaction between stabilisation linked to structural adjustment and poverty. This is to query whether or not the success of current structural adjustment programmes on their own terms is likely to be a sufficient condition for reversing the deterioration of human condition indicators - and, much more important, the human conditions - in sub-Saharan Africa.

On the face of it the answer is negative unless - as is most unusual - the structural adjustment programme both posits and achieves a sustained output growth rate of over 6 per cent and a full recovery of real government basic service spending (or a targeted, articulated shift toward lower unit cost basic health, education and water and away from higher cost, limited access services) an approach endorsed by the World Bank (1984) but not yet actually built into any existing programme.22/

The reasoning behind this conclusion is relatively straightforward:

- a. growth rates of 4 to 5 per cent before 1979 yielded limited reductions in absolute poverty and slow advances in access to basic services;
- b. structural adjustment requires raising savings and reducing external deficits, implying a lower growth of overall domestic resource use and especially of domestic consumption than of GDP;
- c. most actual structural adjustment programmes - even if not the logic of structural adjustment - are biased against basic services and production by poor people.

This case is accentuated by the fact that almost all programmes have received less external finance than external analysts - notably the World Bank - have thought prudent and have also been buffeted by unanticipated external terms of trade and weather shocks.

What is usually - and quite reasonably - viewed as the model African structural adjustment programme, that of Ghana - adopted by the Ghanaian government in early 1983 and articulated with substantial Bank and Fund input over the subsequent year - appears to illustrate the point:

- a. output growth has been positive in 1983, 1984 and 1985 - the first three-year run of GDP growth in over 20 years with 1984 and 1985 growth probably in the 5 to 6.5 per cent range;
- b. very substantial liberalisation has taken place (notably in respect to exchange rates and prices);
- c. the government borrowing requirement has been reduced to one third the average for sub-Saharan Africa relative to GDP (albeit by reducing real government spending and the ratio of revenue to GDP so that both were in 1984/85 among the lowest in the world);
- d. holding the external financing position in rough balance (and reducing arrears) despite lower than targeted foreign resource inflows and lagged export recovery partly due to weather;
- e. reducing inflation from the order of 120 per cent in 1983 to perhaps 13 per cent in 1985 (admittedly partly because good 1984 and 1985 national harvests followed 1983's very severely drought curtailed crops) and thus achieving positive real interest rates.

It is difficult to envisage a much more successful structural adjustment programme than Ghana's in terms of its own macro production and balance objectives. But the poverty trend appears to remain in the wrong direction. Real cuts in health

and education have virtually halved per capita public health service provision since 1981. Minimum wage levels can purchase perhaps a seventh of a plausible household consumption basket and - after late 1985 increases - remain below 1982 real levels. Real food (but to date not real non-food) grower prices are above 1982 levels, but in the poorest regions even 1985 output remains below 1982's already depressed levels, casting grave doubts on whether most small peasant producers have benefitted. The situation of the growing proportion of urban households in absolute poverty is better than at the peak of the drought/food crisis of 1983/84 but only because of food output recovery and food price falls which are as exogenous to the structural adjustment programme as the 1983/84 food prices and availability deterioration. Inputs and supporting services (e.g. research, extension) relevant to poor farmers' ability to increase production are not being given priority - indeed no coherent framework exists for enabling such peasants to produce more. Reversal of the fall in real health and educational service provision - and some reversal of draconic declines in public service real wages to halt the loss of key personnel and the moonlighting/unofficial use of public resources - has now become a goal, but the initial revenue increasing proposals seem to centre on user fees which are, on the face of it, likely to limit access, and are unlikely to be as revenue/collection cost efficient as more general tax measures.

Limitations of Success

In short, the Ghana Structural Adjustment Programme is a notable success in its own terms. If sustained, its reversal of the declining per capita output trend is both a major achievement and a precondition for sustainable poverty reduction/basic service provision. But partly because of the formulation of some elements in the programme, and even more because of what it does not include, its effect on basic service provision has to date been negative and on absolute poverty uneven but probably negative both for peasant households, the poorest rural areas and for urban slum households. This is clearly an unsatisfactory result in human terms but also in respect to human productive capacity and socio-political sustainability of the programme's successful output recovery side. The question is what can be done - in Ghana and more generally in sub-Saharan Africa - to face poverty issues more directly with the probability of positive short to medium term results within real resource constraints.

It should be made clear that by 1983 Ghana clearly did need to undertake drastic stabilisation and structural adjustment measures. A buildup of imbalances over 1961-65 had - despite, or because of, frequent changes of regime and of verbal policy - never been tackled seriously either in terms of stabilisation or of structural adjustment. The underlying

strength, viability and growth potential of the economy had been declining for over two decades with severe social and political repercussions. Apparent partial recoveries owed more to brief cocoa booms than to underlying performance, let alone purposive policy measures. The 1983 change of course (or seeking to set one as opposed to drifting) was both necessary and courageous and did try to tackle certain key weaknesses. What is at issue is not that, but whether a more inclusive articulation of stabilisation and adjustment, with greater attention to income generation by poor people and to maintaining basic health services and nutritional levels, would have been practicable and desirable.

This question is increasingly asked by Ghanaians and within the World Bank, with a view to redefining structural adjustment so as to make it more inclusive and more effective. From that perspective it is not useful to argue whether human condition indicator decline over 1983-85 was caused by the structural adjustment programme as executed or not. Evidently the decline began before 1983 and would not have been halted by continuation of the 1966-81 policy of resolute irresolution. Equally evidently, the budgetary measures adopted have severely damaged the health service. The basic propositions are that the present trends are humanly, politically and economically unacceptable, and that halting and reversing them should be specific priorities within the structural adjustment programme.

VI. Within African Reach?

Twenty five years in sub-Saharan Africa, much of it grappling with poverty issues, should lead neither to a belief that there are simple answers, nor that answers appropriate to one country at one time are easily generalisable or sustainable. The dilemmas of analysts engaged in the struggle against poverty in the region are reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's lament on getting the better of words only for the things he was no longer disposed to say or the way he no longer wished to say them, and of the recurrent attempts to recapture what had been known and lost and rediscovered - of starting again at a time which seemed unpropitious after 20 years largely wasted.

The need for emergency action is agreed in principle and in practice as - at a more speculative level - is that for basic service restoration, making possible increased production by poor peasants and, perhaps, enhancing opportunities for informal sector employment and productivity advances. However, the longer term goals are often seen as after the crisis and after structural adjustment; the emergency actions tend to be episodic and case by case; the two phases are not articulated and programmed as a sequential whole and both sets of exercises are treated as parallel to production and balance focused macro and sectoral structural adjustment. That is simply not good enough, intellectually or operationally.

Emergency action is essential because people are dying, but also because damage to ecological, production and basic service delivery systems, once sustained, is very hard to reverse and, until reversed, will continue to cost lives. The most obvious emergency support measures are food aid and interim basic medical care. The first is illustrated (as are its limitations) by the responses to the stark visions of starvation in Africa screened in 1984-85. The second is best exemplified by UNICEF's evolving 'Child Survival Revolution' programme including immunisation, anti-diarrhoeal salts (oral rehydration) nutritional monitoring and education, evolving in certain cases into more integrated but still focused primary health care support (isolated rural and/or urban slum posts and clinics).

These programmes are essential. UNICEF's African poster with the question and answer bracketing the face of a young girl - 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' 'Alive' - sets the initial challenge starkly but realistically.

Survival: What Next?

However, emergency action in sub-Saharan Africa will both need to be continued (not necessarily in the same areas) for a decade or more and to be seen as an initial phase of a broader struggle to reduce vulnerability and poverty by creating survival security structures based in Africa and involving poor Africans as producers and subjects, not receivers and objects. This perspective has several implications for emergency programmes:

- a. the question - after survival, what next? - should be posed from the start because of its implications for emergency programming. For example food aid so delivered as to allow peasants to remain in their homes, maintain their social units and prepare for the return of the rains is much more conducive to making survival the first step to self rehabilitation than food aid in mass camps of dislocated, totally dependent refugees;
- b. similarly the same question implies that - e.g. - rural emergency food provision needs to be linked with the inputs (seed, tools, transport home, etc.) needed for an economically wiped out household to begin to produce again;
- c. in parallel, attempts to meet emergency health needs should go beyond specific injections - e.g. immunisation/vaccination campaigns and oral rehydration - to selective support for keeping a basic health service functioning, as illustrated by the UNICEF/Danida basic rural drug provision programme in Tanzania and the UNICEF inputs into selected primary health care posts in Ghana;

- d. emergency inputs should be utilised to increase productive and basic service capacity and enhance the self respect and dignity of participants, e.g. Zimbabwe's rural public works scheme including agricultural infrastructure focused food for work projects;
- e. recipients should be involved as participants in programme operation and - to the extent practicable - coverage and design.

None of these steps is impossible. The usual argument that in an emergency there is no time to take them implies that emergencies are few and far between, unforeseen and not susceptible to identifying overall guidelines for broader approaches (as well as for food distribution or vaccination campaigns).

That is nonsense. Emergency efforts have been needed frequently and repeatedly in sub-Saharan Africa for over a decade. They will continue to be needed. The points outlined above are fairly commonly relevant to articulating programmes. African governments, international agencies, bilateral aid bodies and voluntary organisations can and should plan ahead both as to basic capacity to finance or collect more resources and as to basic programme designs and checklists. Combined with better early warning systems on food supply and health hazards - and less unwillingness to believe and act on the data until people are visibly dying or on the verge of dying from starvation or epidemics - such an approach could both increase the human survival results of emergency programmes and make them infinitely more effective as first steps toward rehabilitation/self rehabilitation of recipients/participants who are, virtually by definition, highly vulnerable and absolutely poor.

Such an approach to emergency (human survival) programming has definite implications for longer term strategies and possibilities for reducing absolute poverty and absolute lack of access to basic services. First, if emergency assistance is to encompass initial rehabilitation it should be seen within the context of longer term employment - food production - basic service - poverty reduction strategies, both as an initial stage and also as a supporting measure to prevent their crippling or destruction when these strategies already existed before the emergency. Second, such a perspective suggests that the relatively watertight compartmentalisation of emergency assistance from development assistance is counter-productive for both and requires critical reassessment and 'structural adjustment'. Third, viewed in this way even emergency, human survival programmes are (or can be) relevant to sustaining and restoring human resources and production and therefore integral to, not an unwelcome diversion from, structural adjustment (cf Reutlinger 1985).

Toward The Longer Term

The articulation of longer term strategies and their components is beyond the scope of this essay for reasons of space, contextual specificity, the author's competence and the need for far more African involvement from the start than has characterised past strategies (including those of the World Employment Programme, WHO and even UNICEF) which are all too much prepared for Africans, rather than with their involvement. A somewhat more detailed sketch of some components can be found in UNICEF's Within Human Reach, a study largely prepared in Africa and with the full involvement of Africans. However, some areas for attention can be flagposted.

First, the production/productivity focus of the present World Bank structural adjustment approach is crucial. Production is important, and stripping programmes of biases against production by poor people neither should nor need mean blurring that goal.

Second, the achievement of less severe external imbalance by a combination of higher exports, genuine import substitution and more concessional resource transfers is also necessary. Structural adjustment and growth of output are, at least in sub-Saharan Africa, totally inconsistent with neo-autarchy. Import strangulation is a fact weighing heavily on poor people in at least half of the region. The true dialogue is on the nature of relationships to the world economy, balance of instruments, phasing and practicable timing.

Third, unless government fiscal and monetary imbalances - and continuous resultant pressures for cuts - can be reduced, the chances of providing basic production support (extension, research, infrastructure, credit) and basic services to small peasant and/or non-agricultural informal sub-sectors are negligible. Prudent fiscal and monetary management is as integral to 'economic adjustment with a human face' (cf. UNICEF 1985:64ff) as to any other variant.

Fourth, because government resources (financial, human, physical, foreign exchange) are limited, priorities - i.e. choices as to what not to do as well as what is to be done - are necessary. For example if primary health care is to be expanded to universal access in sub-Saharan Africa, then its share of health resources relative to limited access, high unit cost curative treatment must be expanded, which may require absolute cuts in the latter. Similarly if production enhancement by low income peasant farmers is a priority, then the research, extension, input supply and other requirements to make such an increase possible must be made available, even though this means reducing allocations to large scale, mechanised, import intensive farming (an alteration of balance likely to have a positive effect on production and external

balance as well as on poverty reduction).

Up to this point what is proposed is not simply consistent with, but based on the same priority themes as, conventional structural adjustment strategy and programming. At least at applied level (possibly not at philosophical) the differences are secondary. However, as argued above, this is not enough if human beings - and especially poor human beings - are seen as the subjects and the justification of development. Production growth plus manageable external and public finance balances are virtually always necessary conditions for significant improvement of the incomes and lives of poor people; they are rarely sufficient conditions. Therefore, a number of additional guideposts are needed.

Focus On Food

Fifth, increased food availability to poor people is a central goal (cf. World Bank 1986). Given the external balance position, this means either enhanced production or balanced regional trade expansion in all but a handful of cases. But food availability to the majority of ill-nourished Africans who are members of poor peasant households, requires that they be enabled to produce more (cf. Burki 1985; World Bank 1986). This is economically feasible - indeed much more cost efficient than most large scale agricultural programmes - and in the present food crises context probably politically and intellectually feasible as well. The problem is partly technical - articulating contextually relevant programmes based on collecting reasonably accurate data and testing/adapting new techniques for application. It is also partly institutional and partly resource management - actually giving priority to hoes and field testing, effective extension and availability of seasonal inputs on time.^{23/} None of these technical and institutional problems are inherently any harder to solve than those of other agricultural production promotion strategies. Similar considerations apply to enhancing poor peasant cash income which in most cases will come primarily from achieving a genuine food surplus above household self provisioning requirements. This is not to argue against increasing non-food crop production for industrial inputs (e.g. cotton) and for export. Sub-Saharan Africa's problem is one of low agricultural growth, not substitution of non-food for food crops. With rational agricultural prices peasants can judge what balance of crops to produce for self provisioning and for sale and whether to seek saleable surpluses of food or grow non-food crops in addition to self provisioning food production. For example, in some drought prone areas small peasant farmers are well advised to grow both cotton and food crops, with the former an anti-famine safeguard because low rainfall affects cotton far less (indeed in some areas an optimal cotton weather year results in partial food crop failure and vice versa).

Sixth, effective food availability for poor urban (or other non-agricultural) households turns on price/income relationships. Attempts to hold food prices down by squeezing growers are counter-productive (especially if growers are actually squeezed, less so if they simply use parallel markets) because they reduce supply and either result in higher effective prices to low income consumers or in unmanageable import and subsidy bills. Higher rural productivity and larger supplies are much more likely to reduce real urban food prices. Therefore, the concentration must be on raising incomes through more, and more productive²⁴, employment/self employment. How to do so is the basic question and one needing data (on what is produced how and on what the actual income sources of low income sub-Saharan African households are, as well as on technical and institutional production/employment/productivity possibilities), plus a coherent approach (not treating 'appropriate technology' or 'the informal sector' as isolated, homogenous artifacts which they are not) linked to a systematic attempt to treat employment/distribution and production/productivity issues as joint goals and programming exercises, not separate or alternative ones.

The World Employment Programme and subsequent African basic needs mission studies do provide a foundation for devising contextual approaches on these lines. The main obstacles - once better data bases are built - would appear to be political (the urban poor in sub-Saharan Africa are neither represented in enough governing sub-class coalitions nor enough of a threat to their survival to receive priority attention in many countries) and intellectual (the depth and extent of urban poverty is still not fully comprehended, the limits of modernisation approaches are only beginning to be perceived, the somewhat faddy, sloppy and romantic approaches of some 'intermediate technology' and 'informal sector' true believers have created a climate of scepticism). The key crisis forcing rethinking is the growing realisation that with three to four per cent annual economically active population growth to the end of the century, employment growth outside peasant agriculture and the large scale, capital intensive enterprise sector is essential. Enhanced productivity and greater production on the one hand give the possibility of having effective urban consumer access to food and basic consumer goods, and on the other rural producer access to basic consumer goods and agricultural inputs. Both non-agricultural workers and peasants need to become less poor and to have incentives for raising productivity (and working longer) to raise marketed output of goods and services.

And Basic Services

Seventh, universal access to basic services (health, education, water and production support such as research and extension related to the two preceding priorities) within a

finite time period (even if that must be up to 20 or 25 years) needs to be seen a priority. Poor people, especially women and indigenous minorities, do benefit disproportionately from broadening access because when access is constricted they are the ones excluded. Literacy, nutrition, health and reduction of time spent collecting water are critical to enhancing the ability to work harder and more productively now and over time.^{25/} To articulate such priorities into costed, sustainable programmatic form is not impossible if: a) non-essentials are cut out (e.g. via basic drug lists); b) there is a real priority in personnel and policy allocation given to doing so. The obstacles are - especially for health and water - intellectual and political. Low cost/universal access services are only now building up a cadre of professionals, a body of literature and a degree of respectability even remotely resembling that behind 'state of the art' approaches whose costs are such as to render them largely non-functional or practical only on a limited access basis in sub-Saharan Africa. Piped water to houses and high quality curative medicine do appeal directly to political decision takers and civil servants (who use and - reasonably enough - want to have them). The balance in the intellectual dialogue is shifting toward low cost/universal access; the political self interest obstacle is very real and often very intractable in most of sub-Saharan Africa.

Eighth, basic survival and support mechanisms are needed because emergencies will continue to arise. People matter, and the view of Nassau Senior that the Irish famine would not kill enough people to achieve adequate structural adjustment of population to land is not an acceptable political economic position today. Again there is a perfectly respectable production case - the reduction of dislocation caused by unforeseen and unprepared for emergencies could have a high payoff in reducing their immediate and subsequent negative impact on growth. The problem is in devising approaches which do meet survival and preservation of self rehabilitation potential needs while being financially and institutionally feasible in specific sub-Saharan African contexts.^{26/} A crucial set relate to food (see Reutlinger 1985; World Bank 1986). Pre-planned food for work programmes (urban as well as rural) operating at some level continuously but capable of being stepped up nationally or locally when required are an example. So, where technically and financially feasible, are food reserves linked to minimum buying price safety nets for peasant producers in bumper crop years. Such an approach would also avert the danger of food aid so depressing domestic crop prices in good years as to reverse the production revival - a danger which is exacerbated by the long lag between need and supply of food aid usually resulting in large deliveries in the six months after domestic supplies have become adequate.^{27/} A related approach applies to sub-marginal agricultural/pastoral area residents. Here production returns to combined input and emergency relief (including food for work) programmes may well be low and the potential for

sustained productivity increases problematic. However, in practice there is often nowhere else the human beings in these areas can go. If any value is placed on their survival and welfare, cost efficient programmes to ensure it are needed. Economic growth alone cannot proceed fast enough to end chronic food insecurity for these people. Both because their lives do matter and because chronic food insecurity reduces their productivity yet further, specific interventions in their favour - including improving their production capacity, providing additional income generating possibilities (e.g. seasonal works programmes) and emergency food and production input distribution - are needed (cf. Reutlinger 1985).

Ninth, environmental and ecological protection should be rescued from its European/North American upper middle class origins and related to the struggle against poverty and for sustainable production. Need can be as damaging environmentally as greed but cannot be dealt with by the same instruments. For example, deforestation (more accurately denudation by stripping all tree and bush cover) is disastrous in its impact on productivity and in its contribution to desertification (loosely defined), erosion and dust bowls. It also increases the burdens on women and girls (and reduces their ability to grow crops, attend school, secure medical attention, improve environmental sanitation). If it is caused by land mining farmers - e.g. Western Sudanese mechanised sorghum farming - or forest ravaging loggers, then financial and criminal sanctions are relevant. But if - as in a majority of the most critical sub-Saharan African cases - it is caused by an increasing population practising shorter rotations and needing to collect (for household provisioning or sale to urban areas) fuel and building materials, such measures are both normatively inappropriate and certain to fail. Imprisoning or hanging every bush cutter from Timbuktoo to Gao or Mwanza to Shinyanga is hardly a plausible answer to neo-desertification in Mali or dust bowl development in Tanzania. Tree planting (encouraged by extension services but basically carried out by rural residents and/or urban fuel oriented producer co-operatives) and alternative fuel development would appear to be the only practicable basic answers^{28/} even if both require time and patience to build up an adequate, self sustaining basis.

Tenth, budgetary balance should be restored primarily by increasing revenue, not cutting services. In sub-Saharan Africa, revenue to GDP ratios vary but some are almost incredibly low even for very low income countries. Universal access basic services cannot be provided primarily on a profit making basis, both because large portions of them can operate only at a 'loss' and because external economies are large. Within revenue augmentation, attention should be focused on selective (progressive to well above the poverty line) indirect taxes and on progressive direct taxes which are in practice at least mildly redistributive on both the revenue and - more particularly - the expenditure side. Fees on

limited access, high cost services (e.g. household water connections, above average use household electricity and water bills, above average health facility space and diet provision, specialist medical treatment) are at least as justifiable on this basis as luxury consumer goods taxes and are often fairly easy and low cost to collect. Charges for basic services are more problematic. Unless a quick, effective waiver system at contact point can be devised and operated, poor people, and especially their children, will be excluded. If fees can be seen to relate to services (e.g. a biannual borehole overhaul fee raised communally and paid when - and if - the overhaul takes place; local contribution of agricultural work or food to allow a primary health care worker to do health work without destroying the family nutritional base) they can help mobilise resources, increase community support and reduce net central government cost. Otherwise they will be very unpopular in a context of fragile and often interrupted services. Large numbers of small charges have high collection costs - not least in skilled personnel time if, for example, nurses are expected to collect hundreds of small oral rehydration salts or vaccination fees as part of their daily work.^{29/}

Accountability, Participation And Production

Eleventh, without participation by poor people no anti-poverty programme will be fully successful even in material terms. The case for participation in production and resource mobilisation (e.g. self help inputs of labour, materials, even cash into basic service and infrastructure provision) is presumably self evident. What is less accepted is that poor people need to participate in programme design, ongoing management and monitoring/evaluation. The reasons are not romantic - poor people do have knowledge about their own needs and capabilities which experts do not; participation in production and 'takeup' of services is related to whether they do correspond and are responsive to users' needs and preferences; participation can create incentives for officials to be more responsive to poor people (a not inconsiderable factor in programme success, however good or weak the initial design); self help resource mobilisation is practicable only if those who are to mobilise the resources believe their use is appropriate, for their benefit and at least partially under their control. The political and institutional obstacles to participation (and the real, if partial and limited, successes in overcoming them) do not need rehearsing and are not limited to sub-Saharan Africa. They need to be seen as conflicts to be contained, circumvented or overcome, not as given and immutable barriers to action.

Participation - and accountability - pose special problems for external bodies including multilateral, bilateral and voluntary aid or development agencies. This is true even when they are intellectually committed to participation and to

accountability to intended beneficiaries. First, almost by definition their personnel are 'outsiders' usually with fairly brief country experience and broad perception gaps or distance from host government officials and intellectuals, let alone African peasants, urban slum dwellers, women and children. Second, their structures of accountability run (usually hierarchically) through their own institution to its policy makers and those to whom it is accountable, not to host governments and through them to ordinary Africans, much less directly to the latter. In a sense these tensions are not fully soluble. However, facing them squarely is a necessary first step toward reducing tensions to manageable levels, improving host-agency relationships and avoiding the escalation of tensions into antagonistic contradictions and the deterioration of dialogue into accusatory rhetoric.

Twelfth, while any strategy for overcoming poverty must be based on the actions of poor people and poor countries in sub-Saharan Africa, if it is to have a real chance of sustainable success, external support is critical. The resources available domestically are too limited and the exogenous shocks too great for any strategy depending wholly on domestic resources to be more than problematic in results or more than excruciatingly slow in paying off (especially for its intended beneficiaries and participants). The need for real resource - including knowledge - transfers (from other developing countries as well as from industrial ones) is as great in respect to the broader as to the narrower aspects of structural adjustment.

One 'resource' of which less is needed is pre-emptive or coercive advice. Imposed programmes rarely survive the crisis stick or the resource carrot - even if they are inherently sound. Only Africans are primarily concerned about and able to achieve the development of Africa. The record of expert model solutions to African problems is - to say the least - not very good, partly at least because these models almost always lack contextual, temporal and technical knowledge Africans (often poor Africans) possess and their expert designers did not.

The above comment may seem a good reason not to have written this essay. However two justifications exist. Dialogue and suggestion are not the same as pre-emptive designing or coercive advice. And the case for narrowly defined structural adjustment and setting aside the battle against poverty and for universal access to basic services has been so widely trumpeted as to be deafening - even to those Africans who doubt its validity. There is an obligation on those who believe there are alternatives to make clear that Africans are not alone in seeing the 'new conventional wisdom' on Africa as partial, narrow and in part ill designed and worse implemented.

VII. A Valedictory Note

To scrutinise this paper for universal, timeless, general, easy, directly applicable answers to how to overcome poverty in sub-Saharan Africa would be futile. Part of its message is that there are no such answers - except wrong ones. Socio-political and political economic strategies, actions and results do have general internal requirements and organisational principles but to become operational (at least as envisaged), they must have objective contextual correlatives in time and space.

The struggle against poverty - and especially against despairing acceptance that the fight is inevitably and irretrievably lost - in sub-Saharan Africa today is waged in an unpropitious context. But it is not an impossible context. Even more fundamental, poor Africans and those concerned with them have only that context and its present realities, limitations and potentials from which to begin. Past experience in the struggle against poverty does not suggest that the New Jerusalem can be achieved nor that partial successes once won will be easily or permanently sustainable. But nor does it suggest either that nothing can be done or that nothing can be done until production problems are largely overcome. Strategies of structural adjustment combining production and distribution, productivity and raising poor households' incomes, food balance and external balance, fiscal balance and progress toward universal access to basic services - and their partial and gradual articulation and implementation - are within human reach generally and within African reach specifically.

TABLE 1
SELECTED QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS:
1960 - mid-1980s (a)

	<u>Ghana</u>		<u>Late</u> <u>1970s</u>	<u>1980s</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 Enrolment 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

...../34

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); UNICEF 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 1970s between 1975 and 1980; 1980s 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 1970s 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 made by author based on fragmentary data.

Notes

1. The attempt to separate technical and normative production and distribution issues in applied economics is a fairly recent heresy or fad following about 20 centuries during which they were viewed as integrally interrelated.
2. See, for example, T. Rose (ed), 1985, Crisis and Recovery In Sub-Saharan Africa: Realities And Complexities; R. H. Green (ed.) 1985 Sub-Saharan Africa: towards oblivion or reconstruction, Journal of Development Planning; No. 15; P. Ndegwa, L. P. Mureithi and R. H. Green (eds), 1985, Development Options For Africa In The 1980's and Beyond, Oxford University Press, Nairobi; World Bank, 1984, Toward Sustained Development In Sub-Saharan Africa: A Joint Programme Of Action, Washington, D.C.
3. The most complete general example is usually seen as being the World Bank's 1981 Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda For Action, of which Allison and Green published a detailed review and critique in 1983.
4. Governors sometimes did, by the nature of their posts, take a more territorially self contained view with some impact on territorial, but much less on overall, colonial policy.
5. A reading of a random selection of colonial bluebooks, reports, minutes and semi-analytical pieces - including Fabian ones on endeavours such as the post 1945 groundnut schemes - rapidly brings home the colonial economy in the service of the metropolitan economy focus, as opposed to African welfare or even overall territorial development, of colonial conceptualisation even when dealing with topics such as wages, employment or peasant production. Again some governors - for example, Sir Gordon Guggisberg in the Gold Coast and Lord Lugard in Nigeria - were partial exceptions even if rather technocratic and paternalistic in their approach to the welfare of Africans and conceptually shaky in their delineation of how to expand territorial production.
6. In German East Africa (Tanzania) examination of German tombstones suggests that diseases killed at least one German per mile of rail built, while West Africa's European health condition was as much described as caricatured by the tag 'The Bight of Benin where many go in; but few come out again'.
7. Unpublished Tanzania data suggest a 3 to 2 ratio of minimum wage consuming power to that of the average

peasant household; scattered West African estimates include several of the same order in the mid-1970s. Much higher estimates usually compare peasant cash incomes with all urban income earners, or value peasant self provisioning in food at farmgate prices and worker food at urban retail prices both of which distorts real consuming power differentials.

8. Centred on the ILO's World Employment Programme and 'Basic Needs' conceptualisation (cf. Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One World Problem, ILO, Geneva, 1976) and the World Bank's 'Absolute Poverty' conceptualisation and projects toward its eradication.
9. In fact in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa a fairly steady post 1970 increase in policies aimed at enhancing growth of food production backed by generally increased resource allocations has paralleled a worsening achieved output growth trend, despite grower price/urban wage terms of trade shifts in favour of domestic food over most of the period. There are exceptions and it is probable that the causal relationship runs from the negative output trend to the policy/resource packages and not vice versa, but even on the most favourable reading, policy was not in fact effective and resource allocations were not efficient in production payoff terms.
10. See sources cited at Note 2 especially Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards oblivion or reconstruction (contributions by S. Please and R. H. Green) and Toward Sustained Development in Sub-Saharan Africa.
11. Real wage falls of over 50 per cent since the mid-1970s are common and 75 per cent ones not uncommon. Given base levels of consumption these must have been partially offset by rises in other components of household income. Otherwise the household members would literally be unhoused, naked and starving or dead.
12. The accuracy of these data is certainly open to question. 80 per cent averages taken literally would imply starvation was rampant among at least the bottom fifth of the food distribution and 68 per cent would suggest half the people were in the grip of a major famine. There is some reason to believe FAO (and national) estimates in some countries understate food availability, and that up to a point low height and weight represent adaptation to conditions of low food availability which do reduce minimum nutritional levels consistent with health. However, there is no reason to doubt the pattern of declining availability shown in many cases for over a decade and for almost all since the late 1970s. Equally, adaptation cannot explain the high and rising levels of clinical malnutrition in

children which are based on less globalistic criteria, nor explain away the very real micro and qualitative evidence of chronic inability to work hard, to study effectively, to benefit from health care which are reported, even under non-famine conditions, in most SSA countries.

13. Thus Northern and Upper Ghana are usually perceived as food deficit areas. In nutritional terms they most certainly are. But they are substantial net food (yams, groundnuts, cattle and to a lesser extent millet and guinea corn) exporters to the rest of Ghana and to Burkina Faso, except in the most severely drought affected years, because most peasant households have no alternative way of meeting basic cash purchase requirements. (The regional rice surplus is less relevant to the argument as it comes from land extensive, capital intensive, large, mechanised farms, not peasant growers.)
14. Perceptions may be wrong - see, e.g Note 26 - but if acted on they do have objective results and are a real cause of decisions.
15. How 'efficient' is defined is not always clear since the assumed shadow prices and costs used to flag supposedly efficient units or sub-sectors are problematic, imprecise and volatile in the extreme. E.g. in 1984 at the illegal market exchange rate, Tanzania apparently had a comparative disadvantage in producing maize and a comparative advantage in producing electrical distribution equipment, while in 1985 it appears to have a comparative advantage in both.
16. This is one issue on which 'new conventional wisdom' and alternative approaches are in broad agreement. Most African agriculture ministries, contractors and consultants to large scale projects and some World Bank country programmes, however, tend to take the reverse position; quite why is unclear for the first and last groups as the overall empirical record hardly supports them.
17. However, simply demobilising (in the sense of firing) or not providing adequate rations and living wages to soldiers is not a viable form of cut. Quite predictably it is conducive to total indiscipline and uncontrollable living by taking on the part of the soldiers. A significant portion of Uganda's 1981-85 security/security force catastrophes relate directly to such fiscal balance oriented 'savings'.
18. World Development Report statistics do not suggest substantial cuts in health or education shares of total spending - especially if debt service is excluded.

19. In health for example it is very easy to cut vaccination campaigns and transport; relatively easy to cut rural primary health care, patient diets and - because foreign exchange availability gives an exogenous limit - drug and equipment supply; rather harder to reduce central hospital maintenance and hardest to retrench on personnel (albeit not to lower their real emoluments by holding them static or increasing them 'moderately' in the face of rampant inflation). Staff without adequate pay, in crumbling buildings, with next to no drugs or transport are unlikely to be able to sustain a meaningful medical service.
20. For example, in Tanzania the rate of growth of Domestic Credit Formation is about half that of inflation as measured by the cost of living index. On the face of it this is a highly restrictive policy and one which would need positive real interest rates to balance supply and demand without severe overall credit rationing. In practice the commercial banking sector is relatively liquid and enterprise sector DCF increases are well below limits, raising doubts as to what a 'market clearing' interest rate actually would be.
21. In more technical terms poor people can be expected to have high positive time and risk avoidance preferences. The internal logic implicit in existing structural adjustment programmes often calls for low preferences on both counts.
22. Arguably such shifts - especially within health - are incorporated in both Zimbabwean and Tanzanian structural adjustment policies. However, in neither case is the shift the result of clear macro articulation, and since neither Zimbabwe nor Tanzania has secured World Bank structural adjustment loans (nor a sustained IMF high credit tranche stabilisation agreement) there is a tendency to view their policies as not constituting structural adjustment. Both have been atypical in perceiving structural adjustment as a precondition for full stabilisation, not vice versa, even though both accept that initial imbalance reduction is necessary for structural adjustment to be effective. In Zimbabwe 1984-85 results suggest substantial success in stabilisation and some in structural adjustment, whereas in Tanzania substantial 1981-85 progress in structural adjustment has been rendered less than fully effective by distinctly limited success in attempts to reduce external and domestic resource imbalances.
23. For a programmatic sketch see Daniel, Lipton, and Green 1985.
24. Higher productivity is basic - in the context of most

informal sectors in sub-Saharan Africa - to higher real incomes. Reduction of exploitation may often also be necessary, but until they are able to raise their productivity most informal sector employees/self employed cannot achieve minimum adequate household incomes no matter how fairly they are paid for what they produce.

25. Interestingly, the World Bank's variant of the 'new conventional wisdom' has never fully lost sight of this point and has recently begun to reassert it. Some of the production oriented justifications of education and health are rather distressingly formulated - they would make equal sense if the 'objects' discussed were machines or cattle - but the underlying point that the productionist case reinforces the human concern one for basic services is an important and powerful one.
26. Contexts - not the sub-Saharan African context. For example, food stamps for poor households might be a fiscally and administratively feasible food security approach in Mauritius but pretty clearly not in - say - Mauretania. Similarly large inter year grain storage may make little sense in Botswana which is bordered by two large grain exporters and has a relatively satisfactory foreign exchange position; in Zambia both foreign exchange constraints and the need to restructure the economy away from mining point in the other direction.
27. This may be unfair to decision takers. With crop yields uncertain until harvest and the procurement/shipment time required long, it is prudent not to close down food aid (or other import) pipelines prematurely. However, the same cure of minimum grower prices and reserve stocks would fit equally well to alleviate the problems resulting from such prudence.
28. The role of better stoves is controversial. Those developed are with few exceptions so unpopular as to suggest serious design or overlooked side effect weaknesses. In any case substituting a purchased stove for three stones to save wood produced (collected) by direct labour input is not a practical prescription for poor rural households to follow.
29. The critique on the grounds of collection cost is far from radical - it is standard Treasury practitioner wisdom aggregated from experience. That on indirect costs to unpaid collectors is not one Treasuries are so prone to make, but is one they recognise and to a degree accept - precisely because their experience is that heavy collection burdens on non-Treasury institutions or enterprises result in protests, need to pay collection fees and/or very poor collection rates. Many of the

detailed fee schemes proposed appear to be 'academic' or 'ideological' in the perjorative sense - it is hard to suppose their authors have any knowledge of revenue management and collection and on occasion charging the user seems to be the goal in and of itself whether the net revenue secured is substantial, negligible or even negative. Perhaps the author is biased because for nine years he was a practising Treasury civil servant responsible inter alia for devising administratively feasible and cost efficient revenue measures and structures.

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Essays in honour of H. W. Singer on his
75th birthday

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Contents

<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Introduction by Edward Clay and John Shaw</i>	1
PART I DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM	
1 Approaches to Quantifying the World Food Problem <i>Barbara Huddleston</i>	9
2 Malnutrition and Human Capital: Problems of Theory and Practice <i>Philip Payne</i>	22
3 The Changing Role of Developing Countries in Agricultural Trade <i>Tim Josling</i>	42
PART II WHAT COULD BE DONE?	
4 Adjustment with a Human Face: A Broader Approach to Adjustment Policy <i>Richard Jolly</i>	61
5 Sub-Saharan Africa: Poverty of Development, Development of Poverty <i>Reginald Herbold Green</i>	78
6 Rural Productivity, Malnutrition and Structural Adjustment <i>Richard Longhurst</i>	112
7 The Impact of Agriculture on Third World Health: What Goals for Health Professionals? <i>Michael Lipton</i>	123
PART III RESPONSES	
8 Aid for Development: What Motivates the Donors? <i>Raymond F. Hopkins</i>	153
9 Food Aid for Food Security and Economic Development <i>John W. Mellor</i>	173
10 The Effectiveness of Aid as a Problem of Bureaucratic Management <i>Jens H. Schulthes</i>	192

5 Sub-Saharan Africa: Poverty of Development, Development of Poverty

Reginald Herbold Green

What do you want to be when you grow up?
Alive.

UNICEF African poster, 1985

INTRODUCTION

The struggle against poverty and for human conditions of life by and for poor people is not new, neither is it one limited to the poor countries of the south nor is it a static one. Participation in it – from the Temple Commission on unemployment in the UK of the 1930s, through the early days of the United Nations' economic development effort beginning at the end of the 1940s, and the International Labour Organisation's World Employment Programme in the 1970s to his present service with UNICEF – has been an abiding and integral part of Hans Singer's devotion to applied economics as a vocation – economics in its original Old Testament sense of stewardship and meeting material needs.¹ Nor is Hans a newcomer to Africa – from the founding of the Economic Commission for Africa as the 1950s turned into the 1960s, through the 1970s Kenya ILO Employment Mission to the 1984 UNICEF *State of the World's Children Report*, and study of the impact of the depression on children in Africa (Singer and Green, 1984), there is a span of twenty-five years of work.

Over that period sub-Saharan Africa has become independent; begun to grapple with both poverty and productivity; appeared to

achieve (in a majority of states) a real if limited and imperfect development momentum; and, since the end of the 1970s, fallen into sustained economic unsuccess in all but a small minority of countries.²

That unsuccess has usually been sketched in terms of macroeconomic or political economic aggregate levels and trends (for example in World Bank, *World Development Reports* and in the bulk of the contributions to the sources cited at 2), and flashed on television screens in images of mass starvation. The first abstracts from, and anaesthetises against, the human meaning of economic disintegration – penury, hunger, illness, plague, societal distintegration (at least the outriders and forward projected shadows of the four horsemen of the apocalypse). The latter numbs by its hammer blows of horror, and creates a situation in which the struggle to meet the immediate necessity of maintaining life can push aside the need to alter the conditions which in their extreme form endanger life on a mass basis, but in their more general and more persistent form erode, degrade and shorten it in less dramatic but no less damnable ways.

The reactions to economic unsuccess in sub-Saharan Africa have been dominated by two lines:

- (a) the 'new conventional wisdom'³ centred on IMF stabilisation and World Bank structural adjustment models; and
- (b) the emergency famine relief focus on keeping human beings alive.

The need to balance resources used with resources available – stabilisation – is irrefutable. No economy can avoid stabilisation indefinitely and multiterm, massive imbalance leads to conditions at least as deadly to human welfare as to GDP growth. The basic questions are ones of distribution of costs, timing and – most critical – the relevant roles of cutting resource use versus increasing domestic (produced) and external (transferred) resource supply. Similarly structural adjustment to raise production and productivity generally, and in particular to improve the balance of external resources and food availability relative to requirements, is not itself controversial. In very poor countries especially, even though growth without development is all too possible, development without growth is not. However, it is not the same thing to affirm that production is essential and to encapsulate that advice as 'Seek ye first the kingdom of production and all else shall be added unto you'. There are very real questions of distribution (dominantly turning on who is able to produce what, not on subsequent transfer payments), of basic service levels (both in respect to minimum humanly acceptable standards and to ability to produce),

and of timing of gains as opposed to costs (poor people have very narrow survival margins and it is a brutal fact that the poor are dead in the short, not even in the long, run).

The emergency efforts to avoid mass death do relate to an immediate overriding necessity. For the dead there is no future. By themselves they do not answer what one is keeping people alive for, in the sense of what they will be able to make of their lives. Mass starvation in sub-Saharan Africa to date has been triggered by the interaction of drought, weak transport systems and war (and threatened, albeit to date averted, when the first two interacted particularly savagely). But it has been triggered both because the margin between 'normal' food supply and starvation is narrow, and increasingly narrowing in a majority of the region's countries, and because most poor households have neither the self-employment nor wage employment opportunity either to grow enough to eat or to be productive and well rewarded enough to buy adequate food. In normal years, inability to buy food – not its physical unavailability – is the main cause of urban malnutrition (see Reutlinger, 1985). That reality underlies the famine crises and remains even when reasonable rains return (see Please, 1985 and Green, 1985b) – as they did in many, not all, drought affected areas in the 1984–5 cropping seasons. Furthermore, peasants who have lost herds, tools, seed and other means of farming, especially if also driven from their homes into urban areas or relief camps by the search for food, cannot resume production as if nothing had happened. Flight from the land will be both difficult and slow (Burki, 1985).

Neither of these two approaches directly addresses the challenge of persistent and developing poverty. Even when many sub-Saharan Africa economies had positive per capita output growth not reversed by negative terms of trade shifts, absolute poverty at best declined slowly as a proportion of total population and even then often rose in absolute numbers of human beings affected. Similarly basic service expansion while very real is – with the partial exception of primary education – very far from achieving universal access in most states. In 1980 malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa, defined as not enough calories for an active working life, rose to 44 per cent of the population – 150 million human beings – while 25 per cent – 90 million – were also below the calories needed to avert stunted growth and serious health risk. Both the percentages and the absolute numbers represented deterioration since 1970 (World Bank, 1986; Reutlinger, 1985). The 1970s concerns with employment (for example the World Employ-

ment Programme's country teams, such as the one to Kenya), peasant productivity, the 'informal sector', basic service access, distribution and enabling the poor to become less poor by producing more (or being more fairly paid), related to very real human and economic problems. They self-evidently remain valid in the 1980s as absolute poverty rises and basic services decay, even if the somewhat reductionist emphasis on productivity and survival has for the time being swept them to the margins of dialogue and – with exceptions – of resource allocation. The concern with persistent poverty is not a new one in economics nor one associated solely with particular ideologies. It was after all Adam Smith who made it a premise that no nation could be great and prosperous, the majority of whose people were poor and miserable.

The weakness of conventional stabilisation and structural adjustment strategies is not their focus on regaining balance between resource availability and use, still less their insistence on the need to increase and to alter the makeup of production to achieve and to sustain balance. It is the absence of two additional priorities which is open to question. These are:

- (a) non-deferral of meeting basic needs – with special reference to food, water, health and education;
- (b) priority to increasing productivity of and access to services by poor people and vulnerable groups.

There is no reason to assume that these goals are either economic or socio-political nonsense. The enormous cost of inadequate diet in terms of health, ability to benefit from education, capacity to work hard in lost present and future output terms is increasingly widely recognised (Reutlinger, 1985; World Bank, 1986; UNICEF, 1985b). Similarly the social disintegration and political instability caused by the immiseration of growing numbers of people who were formerly productive, non-destitute members of their societies and economies has high potential economic costs; active in the cases of disorder and insurrection, passive in those of retreat from involvement in state policy and reversion to an 'each for himself and the devil take the hindmost' variant of economic and social neo-anarchy.

The emergency relief efforts weaknesses are rather different. They do recognise that basic needs cannot be deferred and that helping human beings stay alive matters. What they have failed to do in the past is to pose two further questions:

- (a) how can these people have a future – and of what kind – after their lives have been saved?
- (b) how can emergency aid be designed and utilised as a first step towards self-re-establishment including increased/restored production/earned income by the recipients?

Bob Geldof's horrified comments on the need to consider what Bandaïd was keeping people alive for (i.e. what human condition they faced) illustrates the growing concern with the first question. The second has been nibbled at both by analysts and practitioners but mainline action remains to treat it as unhandleable because emergencies are unpredictable, time short and relief logically separable from development.

TRANSITIONS FROM POVERTY TO POVERTY

Poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is a historic fact – as it is virtually universally. There was no golden age before the Europeans came when the land flowed with sorghum, millet and yams, with guinea fowl, cattle and fish, with palm oil, groundnuts and garden eggs, with banana beer, coconut spirits and palm wine, so that all were well fed and prosperous. But it would be equally false to treat poverty as primordial, unchanging and – implicitly – permanently immutable and inevitable.

Pre-colonial poverty turned primarily on submarginal or erratic rainfall and on technological (and therefore productivity) limitations in relation to sub-Saharan Africa's on average poor and difficult soils. The human condition was equally constrained by inadequate health knowledge, practices and services which shortened life and eroded strength. Africans, not Europeans, have always been the chief victims of African diseases and so-called adult African resistance to, for example, malaria often means no more (and no less) than that vulnerable individuals died of it as children.

None of this denies that Africans did develop technologies: some long fallow rotation system (so-called 'shifting cultivation') related admirably and sustainably to poor soils with limited, uncertain rainfall so long as populations were small and the only large demand on the land was for food; some herbal and parapsychological medical practices were far more than common sense or trial and error. Still less does it deny cultural and social achievements. The fact remains that for

many Africans hunger was an annual occurrence, disease a frequent one, life short, and death an ever present danger unleashable by unpredictable and technologically unmanageable weather shifts and disease outbreaks.

Pre-colonial neo-colonialism – of slave traders and merchants manipulating African polities and agents – unleashed two additional causes of poverty and human misery. The first was the slave trade and the social and economic wastelands it created (still writ plain in the low present population of most of Nigeria's middle belt almost a century after the trade ceased). The second was the rise in the number and ferocity of wars – and the killing power available to armies – largely directly or indirectly triggered and/or made possible by European and, secondarily, Arabian interventions (see Rodney, 1972).

Colonialism in Africa rarely meant territorial economic development even in modern macroeconomic terms. Gross territorial product – as opposed to certain products of use to the colonising power and its trading partners – was rarely of central concern. James Mill's definition of a colony as a place in which the colonising power found it convenient to carry out some of its business (e.g. mining, cutting tropical timber, buying or growing tropical crops) provides much more insight into the nature of economic policy than any definition presupposing colonies were seen primarily as territorial economic units in their own right.⁴

As a direct result, poverty of Africans was not an economic concern which could appear on the colonial agenda as more than a footnote. A large export sector with a supporting food and service sector could on occasion reduce poverty – a result not unwelcome to many colonial administrators. Avoiding mass starvation (by price juggling, reserve holding, famine relief and even food for work policies which have a haunting familiarity of kind if not scale to 1970s and 1980s efforts) were sometimes priorities – for example, in the then Tanganyika Mandate – and did end mass starvation. But Adam Smith's dictum on the need for the majority to be non-poor and non-miserable as a precondition for colonial economic success would have been either incomprehensible or seen as at least as subversive as the writings of Karl Marx.⁵

Education for Africans was perceived either as a by-product of missionary endeavour (vaguely backed, tolerated or curtailed in terms of its supposed social and political impact – which was usually far more and far more deeply 'subversive' than colonial administrators, or missionaries! realised) or as an investment in clerks, semi-skilled labour and other human intermediate inputs into the colonial

economy. The calculations were not in sophisticated econometric terms, but colonial education policy was early (and severely cost constrained) human resource development school in concept – even when it flowered to secondary and medical assistant levels. Health facilities for Africans (and until late in the colonial period often for Europeans⁶) were even more exiguous and dependent on missionary subsidisation of the colonial state.

However, the nature of poverty changed. Colonial rule did reduce death from war (caused by dislocation and subsequent starvation or epidemic disease more than by battle casualties); it did end the slave trade; frequently it did provide fail-safe famine relief against mass starvation. These shifts probably both increased life expectancy and (by reducing dislocation) raised rates of increase of food production. Exploitative as it was, colonial production promotion/coercion on average probably raised the command of many African households over goods and services. While there were exceptions (especially in the case of settler colonies), the territories in which most Africans were most likely to be poor and miserable were those like then Haute Volta in which, *a la* Joan Robinson's formulation, the colonial power and its enterprises could find no worthwhile way of exploiting them.

Poverty – or at least human deprivation – was also altered in its nature in additional ways. The first was the imposition of external rule with its impact on polity, society, self-image and self-set standards – clearly a negative shift. The second was the beginnings of education and health services which both improved the human condition of recipients and gave them – and other Africans – a fuller picture of what they were (for whatever reason) still deprived of (a much greater force in both aspects with the late colonial education and health services 'boom'). The third was an increase in population growth (presumably related to the indirect effects of law and order including famine relief and ability to produce more), which began to create pressure on land of plausible quality and security of rainfall (most severely where colonists or plantations had reduced the supply available). This trend was probably not very significant in most areas at the time but laid the foundations for much more generalised and severe problems over the last twenty years.

1960–79: DEVELOPMENT BY MODERNISATION

Development – or at least growth and expansion of both production and basic services – speeded up in the region as a whole and in most

sub-Saharan economies over the two decades after independence. The dominant basic pattern was arguably a more intensive colonial *mise en valeur* emphasis on modernisation and expansion of selected output subsectors and related infrastructure, paralleled by more intensive and extensive human resource investment oriented education, and rather more attention to health and water supply. However, at least one sectoral addition – import substitution industry, one subsectoral shift – towards high capital intensity irrigated and mechanised agriculture, and one perspective shift – to see an African state as a self-contained unit for policy purposes (not an appendage of a broader unit centred abroad) were increasingly evident over time.

Output per capita and service provision coverage did rise (see World Bank, 1981). The advance was uneven – the least favoured countries in natural resource or location terms and those with chronic policy failures did not share significantly in it – slow and unstable, but real. Ironically, on average the best four years were 1976–9, the recovery following the 1973–5 shocks and preceding the 1980–5 débâcle (see sources in note 2).

Poverty, defined as low-income household inability to meet basic consumption needs, was neither rapidly nor consistently reduced. The basic cause was a failure of wages and reasonably productive self-employment to rise much – if at all – more rapidly than population plus a failure of productivity increases to become accessible to the poorest quarter to half of peasant households. Basic service accessibility did rise, albeit often so slowly that absolute numbers without access rose even though a growing share of the people was served.

While mass starvation was – with very rare exceptions – averted, it is doubtful that seasonal, cyclical and endemic hunger were reduced markedly. From about 1965 on food, and from 1970 overall, agricultural production growth lagged behind that of population – a source of subsequent immiseration on three counts: increasing inability to meet domestic food requirements from domestic production; falling per household cash income from sale of food or other crops; and falling export earnings and therefore ability to sustain overall capacity utilisation and maintenance or growth in the early and middle 1970s and more especially since 1979.

The reasons for agricultural malaise are complex, are not clearly understood (especially in terms of weight and interaction) and until the 1980s had very distinct divergences from country to country. In respect to poor farmers three stand out: concentration of resources in ways which left the small, isolated farmer with a low initial income

unable to raise output; increasing population/land ratios; and static proven knowledge (and access to inputs), leading to smaller holdings, more intensive land use unsustainable under existing systems, pushing on to poorer and or higher weather-risk land. As these households usually produce primarily domestic food crops (with sales for cash a deduction from what are often at least marginally inadequate self-provisioning), and effective domestic food prices after 1960 did not in general show a cyclical fall relative to wages, there is some doubt how significant peasant/worker terms of trade shifts and state price policy (rarely effective for domestic food crops) were directly, except for the minority who produced export crops which clearly did suffer from world domestic terms of trade shifts and increases in (public and also private) marketing costs relative to export prices.

While still constituting a small proportion of total absolutely poor households, urban poverty (in low productivity, informal sector, self-or wage-employment) began to grow very rapidly. Whether the urban absolutely poor households were much less poor than the poorest half of peasant households in physical consuming power terms⁷ is unclear and probably varied sharply among countries. What they did have was somewhat better access to basic services and a far higher chance – at least for some – to win their way out of absolute poverty than that of most of the poorer half of peasant households.

In the 1970s, concern about low growth of employment and of rural household incomes led to a substantial employment, technology, urban renewal and rural development studies industry and some pilot projects,⁸ most to fall victim of post 1979 increases in resource stringency. Likewise concern over low food production growth led to increased real resource (including infrastructural investment and marketing working capital), institutional and policy attention to this subsector, often with renewed concentration of attention away from poor households and in most cases with no very evident net positive impact on production.⁹ Finally the late 1960s/early 1970s falling off of growth and the negative 1974–5 growth during the first external shock crises led (during the 1976–9 high growth period) to a set of studies which formed the basis of the new conventional wisdom on stabilisation and structural adjustment, appearing as they did after the 1960–79 development dynamic had gone into reverse in almost all of sub-Saharan Africa.

1979–?: THE RESURGENCE OF POVERTY

Since 1979 the general performance of the region's economies has been

disastrous. The combination of negative per capita physical output growth, falling external terms of trade and declining net external resource inflows (absolutely as well as per capita) have reduced real per capita command over resources to below 1970 levels for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.¹⁰ The World Bank's optimistic projections suggest no regional real output per capita recovery over 1985-95 and possibly some further deterioration on net per capita inflows and terms of trade (World Bank, 1984).

On what has caused this massive shift of direction there is substantial agreement that external shocks (including weather), narrow margins for riding them out and the cumulative impact of over a decade and a half of agricultural non-success were major factors. There is also agreement that government policies were not optimal (not that they had been over 1960-79 either) and were adjusted to contextual disasters too slowly, and that for some polities civil war/state disintegration and/or external aggression, which, for instance, cost the nine SADCC states about \$10 000 million over 1980-4 or well over total external resource inflows for the period (SADCC, 1985), were also decisive causes. The specific weights of particular causes (and especially their interaction and their applicability to specific countries) are not agreed (see Allison and Green, 1985 and sources at note 2) nor are the directions in which policies erred (as opposed to fairly pervasive overambition in scope and underperformance in practice).

In 1984, UNICEF's *Impact of World Recession on Children* was able to produce a broad array of suggestive and scattered empirical data but no statistics comparable to those in the World Bank's annual *World Development Reports*. This was especially true for sub-Saharan Africa (see Singer and Green, 1984). The annual *Statistics on Children in UNICEF Assisted Countries* (UNICEF, 1985) illustrates the fragmentary nature of relevant data (and the three-year time lag for attaining even moderately incomplete global coverage).

Yet a number of topographical elements of the development of poverty can be drawn. Food production per capita is still declining secularly – and in the early 1980s was severely cyclically affected by a drought belt extending from the Cape Verdes through the Sahel to the Sudan and down through the Horn and East Africa to the Cape and back to the Atlantic coasts of Namibia and Angola. The officially estimated ratio of average calorie availability relative to basic requirements fell to 80 per cent in many cases and under 70 per cent in some – a chilling figure when one realises that it means that at least half

the human beings in these countries have still less food than that.¹¹ What micro data exist suggest that the farmers hardest hit fall into several subgroups:

- (a) victims of sustained drought and/or ecological degradation whose previous sources of income (including herds, seed stock, land improvements) have been wiped out;
- (b) the – usually poor, often female headed – households pushed by land hunger on to more marginal (in terms of soil, weather, ecological fragility) land – i.e. the pioneers of the 'rural sponge' effect which has to date limited the rise of open unemployment;
- (c) households in isolated or peripheral (to main urban centres) areas who tend to be physically and institutionally (including for private enterprise) at the end of the line for all goods and services and to suffer first and most severely from decreased flow levels;
- (d) small producers – usually primarily engaged in self-provisioning but also selling food, even if in nutritional terms they have a deficit,¹² because it is their basic source of cash income – who are unable to increase or even sustain output in the face of static applicable knowledge and declining access to inputs.

Effective food prices have risen relative to wages and usually to prices but for the groups cited this does little or no good because of stagnant or falling output. Non-food crop prices have tended to fall in real terms – often dramatically – partly relating to terms of trade internationally, partly to currency overvaluation and partly to rising marketing costs. This has probably affected poor peasants less severely for two reasons: many non-food crop producers are not among the poorest peasant households; and switches from non-food to food crops by poor peasant households have been particularly marked (at least in some areas). However, there are poor peasant households presently or formerly primarily dependent on non-food crops for cash income who have been severely affected including (e.g. in northern and upper Ghana) by having to sell more of their already inadequate food production.

Formal recorded wage employment in the region as a whole has been nearly static since 1979. Meanwhile, real wages have fallen sharply – often to the point at which second and third incomes are essential to household survival. As open unemployment is not common – only those who are not absolutely poor or can depend on relatives can afford to be unemployed – this implies a rapid growth in informal sector self and non-recorded wage employment. Here too

there was clearly a 'sponge effect' in the 1970s, but one which appears to be running into productivity and market limits in the 1980s, at least for most young, uneducated and female informal sector members.

Public service provision has fallen. The basic reasons are budgetary stringency (with falls in real expenditure levels on health, education and water common and draconic ones not uncommon) and foreign exchange shortages (leading to missing drugs, pump spares, textbooks, transport, etc). In some cases quantity of services has fallen markedly – for example, rural health in Zambia and Ghana. In more, quality has declined, for instance, generalised shortages of school and medical service materials and maintenance. Supply and/or usability of nominally available services is severely constrained (e.g. on average 25 per cent of rural water supply units in Tanzania are out of service at any one time because of missing spares or fuel).

The decline in services has pressed particularly hard on end of the line areas – isolated rural districts and urban slums – and on those with rapidly growing populations, again especially urban slums but also some resettlement schemes. Or, more accurately, it has pressed particularly heavily on the poor people living in them. The rise of private primary schools and clinics in poor urban areas does indeed indicate that poor Africans value these services, but also that the state supplied ones are less and less available and/or more and more unsatisfactory.

Raising or reintroducing fees for basic services has had a negative effect on access of the poor to health and education, but how much is unclear. This is true because there is no uniform pattern of fee levels (in some cases they are probably progressive relative to income but not in others), waiver possibilities and collection levels and because their supposed use to restore or sustain service levels is not to date very evident.

The most recent life expectancy and mortality data suggest that the health service cuts may – in several cases – have halted or reversed the slow improvement of life expectancy and decline of infant mortality trends which characterised sub-Saharan Africa over 1960–79. More dramatically diseases nearly eradicated in the late 1950s and 1960s (e.g. yaws and yellow fever in Ghana) have erupted at epidemic levels and remained endemic because funds and transport limited counter-campaign duration and coverage. Moderate and severe child malnutrition has reached levels of 30 per cent or above in most countries for which data exist, and is approaching 50 per cent in some even excluding famine crisis years (UNICEF, 1985 and selected UNICEF country situation reports).

Meanwhile, traditional security systems have been eroded – probably a trend well established in the 1960–79 period but much more nakedly evident since. Kinship and locality or origin groups are less able to support poor members/relatives – especially in urban and natural (or other) disaster-stricken rural areas. This is not simply a result of shifts towards less extended families and urban residence, relevant as these are. With economic contraction fewer and fewer group members have resources (especially of cash or food) to spare – all boats are sinking lower. Similarly higher cost, less available transport reduces urban/rural kin and migrant contacts. Reciprocal exchange – food for manufactures – has probably risen, but this is not an avenue accessible to the very poor. To exchange one must have something above day to day subsistence (including the cost of a trip) to start.

The pattern and balance of absolute poverty have continued to shift. The worst declines – excluding drought/war related famines – appear to have been among urban poor (including for the first time a high proportion of recorded wage employees). In consuming power terms they are now clearly worse off than the majority of peasants and their former advantages in respect to access to basic services and to chances of advancing to higher real incomes are increasingly exiguous. Rural absolute poverty has grown unevenly with the general rule of thumb being that households in peripheral areas – geographically, politically, in absolute agricultural potential or in perceived¹³ commercialised production – have fared worse on production and service access quite apart from being particularly prone to drought and civil government collapse/war debacles.

It is still true that the majority of sub-Saharan Africa's poorest of the poor are in refugee camps and peripheral rural areas, but there is now a rapidly growing urban household category which is almost equally immiserised. In most of the region's economies the net resource flow – at existing prices – is urban to rural, as much in states with an urban as in the minority with a rural policy bias. Oddly the clearest exceptions are two stabilisation/structural adjustment cases, Ghana and Uganda, which are almost alone in having very high export crop taxes. In respect of non-food crops it can be claimed that price distortions hide a true rural to urban flow, but with both the trend and

the post 1979 realignment of food crop prices in favour of producers over wage earners it is hard to argue the same for that subsector. This does not, however, mean equal access to basic services for rural areas because state revenues from rural households and producers are much lower than from mineral and urban, so that expenditure proportional to revenue results in substantially higher per capita spending and service provision in urban areas (and for both rural and urban elites).

Table 5.1 sets out the present levels of several human condition or quality of life indicators for low-income sub-Saharan Africa as of 1982 and their evolution in Ghana over 1960–84. The absolute levels are appalling enough but their Ghanaian evolution is even more dispiriting. Moderately rapid real gains in the 1960s slowed down in the 1970s and have now gone into reverse. Two immediate basic causal inadequacies stand out – food production and the budgetary base for health and education. While Ghana's period of economic unsuccess dates to the early 1960s, not 1979, the record of change on the human condition front does not appear atypical. What was hard won over two decades has been undermined, eroded and threatened with being totally swept away in seven years. The stifling scent of despair is there – not universally, not unconditionally but widely and increasingly.

TOWARDS BROADENING THE FORMULATION OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT?

Structural adjustment – resting on its present tripod of production, state borrowing reduction and selective liberalisation (or redirection of intervention) could have positive implications for poor sub-Saharan Africans. The first (production) leg is a necessary condition for such gains. However, it would appear equally true that most present programmes have unnecessarily built in biases against the poor. Since these costs come early in the adjustment process and the gains from enhanced production later, the temporal pattern is to require the poor to accept high, certain initial costs for lagged, uncertain gains – a pattern more than somewhat inconsistent with their margins above survival or their life expectancy.¹⁴

Table 5.1 Selected quality of life indicators: 1960-mid-1980s

	Ghana				Low-income sub-Saharan Africa (1982)
	1960	1970	Late 1970s	1980s	
1. Average life expectancy at birth	45	49	55	53	48
2. Infant mortality rate	132	107	86	107-20	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 enrolment 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			30-5	45-50	35

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); UNICEF, *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; later 1970s between 1975 and 1980; 1980s 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 to serve the entire population nominally within reach of them.
- (c) 1970 and late 1970s 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 sub-Saharan African countries.
- (f) Estimate made by author on basis of fragmentary data.

There is another – complementary – way of approaching the interaction between stabilisation linked to structural adjustment and poverty. This is to query whether or not success in present structural adjustment programmes on their own terms is likely to be a sufficient condition for reversing the deterioration of human condition indicators – and, much more important, the human conditions – in sub-Saharan Africa.

On the face of it the answer is negative unless – as is most unusual – the structural adjustment programme both posits and achieves a sustained output growth rate of over 6 per cent and a full recovery of real government basic service spending (or a targeted, articulated shift towards lower unit cost basic health, education and water and away from higher cost, limited access services), an approach endorsed by the World Bank (1984) but not yet actually built substantially into any existing programme.¹⁵

The reasoning behind this conclusion is relatively straightforward:

- (a) growth rates of 4 to 5 per cent before 1979 yielded limited reductions in absolute poverty and slow advances in access to basic services;
- (b) structural adjustment requires raising savings and reducing external deficits implying a lower growth of domestic resource use and especially of consumption than of GDP;
- (c) most actual structural adjustment programmes – even if not the logic of structural adjustment – are biased against basic services and production by poor people.

This case is accentuated by the fact that almost all programmes have received less external finance than external analysts – notably the World Bank – have thought prudent, and have also been buffeted by unanticipated external terms of trade and weather shocks.

What is usually – and quite reasonably – viewed as the model African structural adjustment programme, that of Ghana – adopted by the Ghanaian government in early 1983 and articulated with substantial Bank and Fund input over the subsequent year – appears to illustrate the point:

- (a) output growth has been positive in 1983, 1984 and 1985 – the first

- three-year run of GDP growth in over twenty years with 1984 and 1985 growth probably in the 5 to 6.5 per cent range;
- (b) very substantial liberalisation has taken place (notably in respect of exchange rates and prices);
 - (c) the government borrowing requirement has been reduced to one-third the average for sub-Saharan Africa relative to GDP (albeit by reducing real government spending and the ratio of revenue to GDP so that both were in 1984-5 among the lowest in the world);
 - (d) holding the external financing position in rough balance (and reducing arrears) despite lower than targeted foreign resource inflows and lagged export recovery partly due to weather;
 - (e) reducing inflation from the order of 120 per cent in 1983 to perhaps 13 per cent in 1985 (admittedly partly because good 1984 and 1985 national harvests followed 1983's very severely drought curtailed crops) and thus achieving positive real interest rates.

It is difficult to envisage a much more successful structural adjustment programme than Ghana's in terms of its own macro production and balance objectives. But the poverty trend appears to remain in the wrong direction. Real cuts in health and education have virtually halved per capita public health service provision since 1981. Minimum wage levels can purchase perhaps a seventh of a plausible household consumption basket and – after late 1985 increases – remain below 1982 real levels. Real food (but to date not real non-food) grower prices are above 1982 levels, but in the poorest regions even 1985 output remains below 1982's already depressed levels, casting grave doubts on whether most small peasant producers have benefited. The situation of the – growing – proportion of urban households in absolute poverty is better than at the peak of the drought/food crisis of 1983-4, but only because of food output recovery and food price falls which are as exogenous to the structural adjustment programme as the 1983-4 food prices and availability deterioration. Inputs and supporting services (e.g. research, extension) relevant to poor farmers' ability to increase production are not being given priority – indeed no coherent framework exists for enabling such peasants to produce more. Reversal of the fall in real

health and educational service provision – and some reversal of draconic declines in public service real wages to halt the loss of key personnel and the moonlighting/unofficial use of public resources and positions pattern of civil servant survival – has now become a goal, but the initial revenue increasing proposals seem to centre on user fees which are – on the face of it – likely to limit access and unlikely to be as revenue/collection cost efficient as more general tax measures.

In short, the Ghana structural adjustment programme is a notable success in its own terms. If sustained, its reversal of the declining per capita output trend is both a major achievement and a precondition for sustainable poverty reduction/basic service provision. But partly because of the formulation of some elements in the programme and even more because of what it does not include, its effect on basic service provision has to date been negative and on absolute poverty uneven but probably negative both for peasant households, the poorest rural areas and for urban slum households. This is clearly an unsatisfactory result in human terms but also in respect to human productive capacity and socio-political sustainability of the programme's successful output recovery side. The question is what can be done – in Ghana and more generally in sub-Saharan Africa – to face poverty issues more directly and with the probability of positive short- to medium-term results within existing and probable future real resource constraints?

It should be made clear that by 1983 Ghana clearly did need to undertake drastic stabilisation and structural adjustment measures. A buildup of imbalances over 1961–5 had – despite, or because of, frequent changes of regime and of verbal policy – never been tackled seriously either in terms of stabilisation or of structural adjustment. The underlying strength, viability and growth potential of the economy had been declining for over two decades with severe social and political repercussions. Apparent partial recoveries owed more to brief cocoa booms than to underlying performance, let alone purposive policy measures. The 1983 change of course (or seeking to set one as opposed to drifting) was both necessary and courageous and did seek to tackle certain key weaknesses. What is at issue is not that but whether a more inclusive articulation of stabilisation and adjustment, with greater attention to income generation by poor people and to maintaining basic health services and nutritional levels, would have been practicable and desirable on medium-term produc-

tion and productivity as well as human concern grounds.

This question is not unique to the present author. It is increasingly asked by Ghanaians and within the World Bank, not with a view to abandoning structural adjustment but to redefining it to be more inclusive and more effective. From that perspective it is not useful to argue whether human condition indicator decline over 1983–5 was caused by the structural adjustment programme as executed or not. Evidently the decline began before 1983 and would not have been halted by continuation of the 1966–81 policy of resolute irresolution. Equally evidently the budgetary measures adopted have severely damaged the health service. The basic propositions are that the present trends are humanly, politically and economically unacceptable and that halting and reversing them should be specific priorities within the structural adjustment programme.

WITHIN AFRICAN REACH?

The need for emergency action is agreed in principle and in practice as – at a more speculative and non-time-targeted level – is that for basic service restoration, making possible increased production by poor peasants and, perhaps, enhancing opportunities for informal sector employment and productivity advances. However, the longer term goals are often seen as after the crisis and after structural adjustment; the emergency actions tend to be episodic and case by case; the two phases are not articulated and programmed as a sequential whole and both sets of exercises are treated as parallel to (at worst as Christmas tree ornaments on) production and balance focused macro and sectoral structural adjustment. That is simply not good enough, intellectually or operationally.

Emergency action is essential because people are dying but also because ecological, production and basic service delivery system damage once sustained is very hard to reverse and, until reversed, will continue to cost lives. The most obvious emergency support measures are food aid and interim basic medical care against killing diseases and health conditions. The first is illustrated (as are its limitations) by the responses to the stark visions of starvation in Africa screened in 1984–5. The second is best exemplified by UNICEF's evolving 'Child

Survival Revolution' programme including immunisation, anti-diarrhoeal salts (oral rehydration), nutritional monitoring, and education evolving in certain cases into more integrated but still focused primary health care (isolated rural and/or urban slum posts and clinics) support.

These programmes are essential. UNICEF's African poster with the question and answer bracketing the face of a young girl – 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' 'Alive' – sets the initial challenge starkly but realistically.

However, emergency action in sub-Saharan Africa will both need to be continued (not necessarily in the same areas) for a decade or more and to be seen as an initial phase of a broader struggle to reduce vulnerability and poverty by creating survival security structures based in Africa, and involving poor Africans as producers and subjects not receivers and objects. This perspective has several implications for emergency programmes:

- (a) the question – after survival, what next? – should be posed from the start because of its implications for emergency programming. For example food aid, so delivered as to allow peasants to remain in their homes, maintain their social units and prepare for the return of the rains, is much more conducive to making survival the first step to self-rehabilitation than food aid in mass camps of dislocated, totally dependent refugees;
- (b) similarly the same question implies that – for example – rural emergency food provision needs to be linked with the inputs (seed, tools, transport home, etc.) needed for an economically wiped out household to begin to produce again;
- (c) in parallel, attempts to meet emergency health needs should go beyond specific injections – e.g. immunisation/vaccination campaigns and oral rehydration – to selective support for keeping a basic health service functioning, as illustrated by the UNICEF/Danida basic rural drug provision programme in Tanzania and the UNICEF inputs into selected primary health care posts in Ghana;
- (d) and utilise emergency inputs – where possible without delay or sclerotic bureaucratisation – to increase productive and basic service capacity and provide a capacity for self-respect and dignity to participants (no longer pure recipients or 'targets'), e.g. Zimbabwe's rural public works scheme including agricultural infrastructure focused food for work projects;

- (e) while involving recipients as participants in programme operation and – to the extent practicable – coverage and design.

None of these steps is impossible. Emergency efforts have been needed frequently and repeatedly in sub-Saharan Africa for over a decade. They will continue to be needed. The points outlined above are fairly commonly relevant to articulating programmes. African governments, international agencies, bilateral aid bodies and voluntary organisations can and should plan ahead, both as to basic capacity to finance or collect more resources and as to basic programme designs and checklists. Combined with better early warning systems on food supply and health situation deterioration – and less unwillingness to believe and act on the data until people are visibly dying or on the verge of dying from starvation or epidemics – such an approach could both increase the human survival results of emergency programmes and make them infinitely more effective as first steps towards rehabilitation/self-rehabilitation of recipients/participants who are, virtually by definition, highly vulnerable and absolutely poor.

Such an approach to emergency (human survival) programming has definite implications for longer term strategies and possibilities for reducing absolute poverty and absolute lack of access to basic services. First, if emergency assistance is to encompass initial rehabilitation it both should and can be seen within the context of longer term employment – food production – basic service – poverty reduction strategies both as an initial stage and also as a supporting measure to prevent their crippling or destruction when these strategies already existed before the emergency. Second, such a perspective suggests that the relatively watertight compartmentalisation of emergency assistance from development assistance is counter-productive for both and requires critical reassessment and 'structural adjustment'. Third, viewed in this way even emergency, human survival programmes are (or can be) relevant to sustaining and restoring human resources and production, and therefore integral to, not an unwelcome diversion from, structural adjustment (Reutlinger, 1985).

The articulation of longer term strategies and their components is beyond the scope of this essay. However, some areas for attention can be flagposted.

First, the production/productivity focus of the present World Bank structural adjustment approach is crucial. Production is important and stripping programmes of biases against production by poor people neither should nor need mean blurring that goal.

Second, the achievement of less severe external imbalance by a combination of higher exports, genuine import substitution and more concessional resource transfers is also necessary. Structural adjustment and growth of output are, at least in sub-Saharan Africa, totally inconsistent with neo-autarchy. Import strangulation is a fact weighing heavily on poor people in at least half of the region. The true dialogue is on the nature of relationships to the world economy, balance of instruments, phasing and practicable timing.

Third, unless government fiscal and monetary imbalances – and continuous resultant pressures for cuts – can be reduced, the chances of providing basic production support (extension, research, infrastructure, credit) and basic services to small peasant and/or non-agricultural informal subsectors are negligible. Prudent fiscal and monetary management is as integral to 'economic adjustment with a human face' (UNICEF, 1985:64ff) as to any other variant.

Fourth, because government resources (financial, human, physical, foreign exchange) are limited, priorities – i.e. choices as to what not to do as well as what is to be done – are necessary. For example, if primary health care is to be expanded to universal access in sub-Saharan Africa, then its share of health resources relative to limited access, high unit cost curative treatment must be expanded which may require absolute cuts in the latter. Similarly if production enhancement by low-income peasant farmers is a priority then the research, extension, input supply and other requirements to make such an increase possible must be made available, even though this means reducing allocations to large-scale, mechanised, import intensive farming (an alteration of balance likely to have positive production and external balance as well as poverty reduction results).

Up to this point what is proposed is not simply consistent with, but based on the same priority themes as, conventional structural adjustment strategy and programming. However, as argued above, this is not enough if human beings – and especially poor human beings – are seen as the subjects and the justification of development.

Fifth, increased food availability to poor people is a central goal (World Bank, 1986). Given the external balance position, this means either enhanced production or balanced regional trade expansion in all but a handful of cases. But food availability to the majority of ill-nourished Africans who are members of poor peasant households, requires that they be enabled to produce more (Burki, 1985; World Bank, 1986). This is economically feasible – indeed much more cost efficient than most large-scale agricultural programmes – and in the

present food crises context probably politically and intellectually feasible as well. The problem is partly technical – articulating contextually relevant programmes based on collecting reasonably accurate data and testing/adapting new techniques for application. It is also partly institutional and partly resource management – actually giving priority to hoes and field testing, effective extension and availability of seasonal inputs on time.¹⁶ None of these technical and institutional problems is inherently any harder to solve than those of other agricultural production promotion strategies. Similar considerations apply to enhancing poor peasant cash income which in most cases will come primarily from achieving a genuine food surplus above household self-provisioning requirements. This is not to argue against increasing non-food crop production for industrial inputs (e.g. cotton) and for export. Sub-Saharan Africa's problem is one of low agricultural growth not substitution of non-food for food crops. With rational agricultural prices peasants can judge what balance of crops to produce for self-provisioning and for sale and whether to seek saleable surpluses of food or grow non-food crops in addition to self-provisioning food production. For example, in some drought prone areas small peasant farmers are well advised to grow both cotton and food crops, with the former an anti-famine safeguard because low rainfall affects cotton far less (indeed in some areas an optimal cotton weather year results in partial food crop failure and vice versa).

Sixth, effective food availability for poor urban (or other non-agricultural) households turns on price/income relationships. Attempts to hold food prices down by squeezing growers are counter-productive (especially if growers are actually squeezed, less so if they simply use parallel markets) because they reduce supply and either result in higher effective prices to low-income consumers or in unmanageable import and subsidy bills. Higher rural productivity and larger supplies are much more likely to reduce real urban food prices. Therefore, the concentration must be on raising incomes through more, and more productive¹⁷ employment/self-employment. How to do so is the basic question and one needing data (on what is produced how and on what the actual income sources of low-income sub-Saharan African households are, as well as on technical and institutional production/employment/productivity possibilities), plus a coherent approach (not treating 'appropriate technology' or 'the informal sector' as isolated, homogenous artifacts which they are not) linked to a systematic attempt to treat employment/distribu-

tion and production/productivity issues as joint goals and programming exercises, not separate or alternative ones.

The World Employment Programme and subsequent African basic needs mission studies do provide a foundation for devising contextual approaches on these lines. The main obstacles – once better data bases are built – would appear to be political (the urban poor in sub-Saharan Africa are neither represented in enough governing sub-class coalitions nor enough of a threat to their survival to receive priority attention in many countries) and intellectual (the depth and extent of urban poverty is still not fully comprehended, the limits of modernisation approaches are only beginning to be perceived, the somewhat faddy, sloppy and romantic approaches of some 'intermediate technology' and 'informal sector' true believers have created a climate of scepticism). The key crisis forcing rethinking is the growing realisation that with 3 per cent to 4 per cent annual economically active population growth to the end of the century, employment growth outside peasant agriculture and the large-scale, capital intensive enterprise sector is essential. Enhanced productivity and greater production, on the one hand, give the possibility of having effective urban consumer access to food and basic consumer goods and, on the other, rural producer access to basic consumer goods and agricultural inputs. Both non-agricultural workers and peasants need to become less poor and to have incentives for raising productivity (and working longer) to raise marketed output of goods and services.

Seventh, universal access to basic services (health, education, water and production support such as research and extension related to the two preceding priorities) within a finite time period (even if that must be up to twenty or twenty-five years) needs to be seen as an anti-poverty, food production, productive employment and human condition priority. Poor people, especially women and indigenous minorities, do benefit disproportionately from broadening access because when access is constricted they are the ones excluded. Literacy, nutrition, health and reduction of time spent collecting water are critical to enhancing the ability to work harder and more productively now and over time.¹⁸ To articulate such priorities into costed, sustainable programmatic form is not impossible if: (a) non-essentials are cut out (e.g. via basic drug lists); (b) there is a real priority in personnel and policy allocation given to doing so. The obstacles are – especially for health and water – intellectual and political. Low-cost/universal access services are only now building up a cadre of professionals, a body of literature and a degree of

respectability even remotely resembling that behind 'state of the art' approaches whose costs are such as to render them largely non-functional or practical only on a limited access basis in sub-Saharan Africa. Piped water to houses and high quality curative medicine do appeal directly to political decision-takers and civil servants (who use and – reasonably enough – want to have them). The balance in the intellectual dialogue is shifting towards low-cost/universal access; the political self-interest obstacle is very real and often very intractable in most of sub-Saharan Africa.

Eighth, basic survival and support mechanisms are needed because emergencies will continue to arise. People matter and the view of Nassau Senior that the Irish famine would not kill enough people to achieve adequate structural adjustment of population to land is not an acceptable political economic position today. Again there is a perfectly respectable production case – the reduction of dislocation caused by unforeseen and unprepared for emergencies could have a high pay-off in reducing their immediate and subsequent negative impact on growth. The problem is in devising approaches which do meet survival and preservation of self-rehabilitation potential needs, while being financially and institutionally feasible in specific sub-Saharan African contexts.¹⁹ A crucial set relate to food (see Reutlinger, 1985; World Bank, 1986). Pre-planned food for work programmes (urban as well as rural) operating at some level continuously but capable of being stepped up nationally or locally when required are an example. So, where technically and financially feasible, are food reserves linked to minimum buying price safety nets for peasant producers in bumper crop years. Such an approach would also avert the danger of food aid so depressing domestic crop prices in good years as to reverse the production revival – a danger which is exacerbated by the long lag between need and supply of food aid usually resulting in large deliveries in the six months after domestic supplies have become adequate.²⁰ A related approach applies to submarginal agricultural–pastoral area residents. Here production returns to combined input and emergency relief (including food for work) programmes may well be low and the potential for sustained productivity increases problematic. However, in practice there is often nowhere else the human beings in these areas can go. If any value is placed on their survival and welfare, cost efficient programmes to ensure it are needed. Economic growth alone cannot proceed fast enough to end chronic food insecurity for these people. Both because their lives do matter and because chronic food insecurity reduces their

productivity yet further, specific interventions in their favour – including improving their production capacity, providing additional income generating possibilities (e.g. seasonal works programmes) and emergency food and production input distribution – are needed (Reutlinger, 1985).

Ninth, environmental and ecological protection should be rescued from its European/North American upper middle class origins and related to the struggle against poverty and for sustainable production. Need can be as damaging environmentally as greed but cannot be dealt with by the same instruments. For example, deforestation (more accurately denudation by stripping all tree and bush cover) is disastrous in its impact on productivity and in its contribution to desertification (loosely defined), erosion and dust bowls. It also increases the burdens on women and girls (and reduces their ability to grow crops, attend school, secure medical attention, improve environmental sanitation). If it is caused by land-mining farmers – e.g. western Sudanese mechanised sorghum farming – or forest ravaging loggers, then financial and criminal sanctions are relevant. But if – as in a majority of the most critical sub-Saharan African cases – it is caused by an increasing population practising shorter rotations and needing to collect (for household provisioning or sale to urban areas) fuel and building materials, such measures are both normatively inappropriate and certain to fail. Imprisoning or hanging every bush cutter from Timbuktu to Gao or Mwanza to Shinyanga is hardly a plausible answer to neo-desertification in Mali or dust bowl development in Tanzania. Tree planting (encouraged by extension services but basically carried out by rural residents and/or urban fuel oriented producer co-operatives) and alternative fuel development would appear to be the only practicable basic answers²¹ even if both require time and patience to build up an adequate, self-sustaining basis.

Tenth, budgetary balance should be restored primarily by increasing revenue, not cutting services. In sub-Saharan Africa, revenue to GDP ratios vary but some are almost incredibly low even for very low-income countries. Universal access basic services cannot be provided primarily on a profit-making basis both because large portions of them can operate only at a 'loss' and because external economies are large. Within revenue augmentation, attention should be focused on selective (progressive to well above the poverty line) indirect taxes and on progressive direct taxes which are in practice at least mildly redistributive on both the revenue and – more particularly – the expenditure side. Fees on limited access, high cost services (e.g.

household water connections, above average use household electricity and water bills, above average health facility space and diet provision, specialist medical treatment) are at least as justifiable on this basis as luxury consumer goods taxes and are often fairly easy and low cost to collect. Charges for basic services are more problematic. Unless a quick, effective waiver system at contact point can be devised and operated, poor people, and especially their children, will be excluded. If fees can be seen to relate to services (e.g. a biannual borehole overhaul fee raised communally and paid when – and if – the overhaul takes place; local contribution of agricultural work or food to allow a primary health care worker to do health work without destroying the family nutritional base), they can help mobilise resources, increase community support and reduce net central government cost. Otherwise, they will be very unpopular in a context of fragile and often interrupted services. Large numbers of small charges have high collection costs – not least in skilled personnel time if, for example, nurses are expected to collect hundreds of small oral rehydration salts or vaccination fees as part of their daily work.²²

Eleventh, without participation by poor people no anti-poverty programme will be fully successful even in material terms. The case for participation in production and resource mobilisation (e.g. self-help inputs of labour, materials, even cash into basic service and infrastructure provision) is presumably self-evident. What is less accepted is that poor people need to participate in programme design, ongoing management and monitoring/evaluation. The reasons are not romantic – poor people do have knowledge about their own needs and capabilities which experts do not; participation in production and 'take-up' of services is related to whether they do correspond and are responsive to users' needs and preferences; participation can create incentives for officials to be more responsive to poor people (a not inconsiderable factor in programme success, however good or weak the initial design); self-help resource mobilisation is practicable only if those who are to mobilise the resources believe their use is appropriate, for their benefit and at least partially under their control. The political and institutional obstacles to participation (and the real, if partial and limited, successes in overcoming them) do not need rehearsing and are not limited to sub-Saharan Africa. They need to be seen as conflicts to be contained, circumvented or overcome not as given and immutable barriers to action.

Participation – and accountability – pose special problems for external bodies including multilateral, bilateral and voluntary aid or development agencies. This is true even when they are intellectually committed to participation and to accountability to intended beneficiaries. First, almost by definition their personnel are 'outsiders' usually with fairly brief country experience and broad perception gaps or distance from host government officials and intellectuals, let alone African peasants, urban slum dwellers, women and children. Second, their structures of accountability run (usually hierarchically) through their own institution to its policy-makers and those to whom it is accountable, not to host governments and through them to ordinary Africans, much less directly to the latter. In a sense these tensions are not fully soluble (barring participatory, accountable, effective world government which, however desirable, cannot reasonably be posed as a side condition for the struggle against poverty in Africa). However, posing them and facing them squarely is potentially a necessary first step towards reducing tensions to manageable levels, improving host-agency relationships and to avoiding the escalation of tensions into antagonistic contradictions and the deterioration of dialogue into accusatory rhetoric.

Twelfth, while any strategy for overcoming poverty must be based on the actions of poor people and poor countries in sub-Saharan Africa, if it is to have a real chance of sustainable success, external support is critical. The resources available domestically are too limited and the exogenous shocks too great for any strategy depending wholly on domestic resources to be more than problematic in results, or more than excruciatingly slow in paying off (especially for its intended beneficiaries and participants). The need for real resource – including knowledge – transfers (from other developing countries as well as from industrial ones) is as great in respect to the broader as to the narrower aspects of structural adjustment.

A VALEDICTORY NOTE

The struggle against poverty – and especially against despairing acceptance that the fight is inevitably and irretrievably lost – in sub-Saharan Africa today is waged in an unpropitious context. But it is not an impossible context. Even more fundamental, poor Africans and those concerned with them have only that context and its present realities, limitations and potentials from which to begin. Past

experience in the struggle against poverty does not suggest that the New Jerusalem can be achieved nor that partial successes once won will be easily or permanently sustainable. But nor does it suggest either that nothing can be done or that nothing can be done until production problems are largely overcome. Strategies of structural adjustment combining production and distribution, productivity and raising poor households' incomes, food balance and external balance, fiscal balance and progress towards universal access to basic services – and their partial and gradual articulation and implementation – are within human reach generally and within African reach specifically.

Notes

1. The attempt to separate technical and normative, production and distribution issues in applied economics is a fairly recent heresy or fad following about twenty centuries during which they were viewed as integrally interrelated.
2. See, for example, Rose (ed.) 1985; Green (ed.) 1985a; Ndegwa, Mureithi and Green (eds) 1985; World Bank 1984.
3. The most complete general example is usually seen as being World Bank, 1981, of which Allison and Green published a detailed review and critique in 1983.
4. Governors sometimes did, by the nature of their posts, take a more territorially self-contained view with some impact on territorial, but much less on overall, colonial policy.
5. A reading of a random selection of colonial bluebooks, reports, minutes and semi-analytical pieces – including Fabian ones on endeavours such as the post-1945 groundnut schemes – rapidly brings home the colonial economy in the service of the metropolitan economy focus, as opposed to African welfare or even overall territorial development, of colonial conceptualisation even when dealing with topics such as wages, employment or peasant production. Again some governors – for example, Sir Gordon Guggisberg in the Gold Coast and Lord Lugard in Nigeria – were partial exceptions even if rather technocratic and paternalistic in their approach to the welfare of Africans and conceptually shaky in their delineation of how to expand territorial production.
6. In German East Africa (Tanzania) examination of German tombstones suggests that diseases killed at least one German per mile of rail built, while West Africa's European health condition was as much described as caricatured by the tag 'The Bight of Benin where many go in; but few come out again'.
7. Unpublished Tanzania data suggest a 3 to 2 ratio of minimum wage-consuming power to that of the average peasant household;

scattered West African estimates include several of the same order in the mid-1970s. Much higher estimates usually compare peasant cash incomes with all urban income earners or value peasant self-provisioning in food as farmgate prices and worker food at urban retail prices, both of which distort real consuming power differentials.

8. Centred on the ILO's World Employment Programme and 'Basic Needs' conceptualisation (ILO, 1976) and the World Bank's 'Absolute Poverty' conceptualisation and projects towards its eradication.
9. In fact, in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, a fairly steady post-1970 increase in policies aimed at enhancing growth of food production backed by generally increased resource allocations have paralleled a worsening achieved output growth trend, despite grower price/urban wage terms of trade shifts in favour of domestic food over most of the period. There are exceptions and it is probable that the causal relationship runs from the negative output trend to the policy/resource packages and not vice versa, but even on the most favourable reading policy was not in fact effective and resource allocations were not efficient in production pay-off terms.
10. See sources cited at note 2, especially Green (ed.) 1985a (contributions by S. Plese and R. H. Green) and World Bank 1984.
11. The accuracy of these data is certainly open to question. Eighty per cent averages taken literally would imply starvation was rampant among at least the bottom fifth of the food distribution, and 68 per cent would suggest half the people were in the grip of a major famine. There is some reason to believe FAO (and national) estimates in some countries understate food availability, and that up to a point low height and weight represent adaptation to conditions of low food availability which do reduce minimum nutritional levels consistent with health. However, there is no reason to doubt the pattern of declining availability shown in many cases for over a decade and for almost all since the late 1970s. Equally, adaptation cannot explain the high and rising levels of clinical malnutrition in children which are based on less globalistic criteria, nor explain away the very real micro and qualitative evidence of chronic inability to work hard, to study effectively, to benefit from health care which are reported, even under non-famine conditions, in most sub-Saharan African countries.
12. Thus northern and upper Ghana are usually perceived as food deficit areas. In nutritional terms they most certainly are. But they are substantial net food (yams, groundnuts, cattle and to a lesser extent millet and guinea corn) exporters to the rest of Ghana and to Burkina Faso, except in the most severely drought affected years because most peasant households have no alternative way of meeting basic cash purchase requirements. (The regional rice surplus is less relevant to the argument as it comes from land extensive, capital intensive, large, mechanised farms not peasant growers).
13. Perceptions may be wrong—see, e.g., note 12—but if acted on they do have objective results and are a real cause of decisions.
14. In more technical terms poor people can be expected to have high positive time and risk avoidance preferences. The implicit internal logic of structural adjustment programmes often calls for low preferences on both counts.

15. Arguably such shifts – especially within health – are incorporated in both Zimbabwean and Tanzanian structural adjustment policies. However, in neither case is the shift the result of clear macro articulation and since neither Zimbabwe nor Tanzania has secured World Bank structural adjustment loans (nor a sustained IMF high credit tranche stabilisation agreement), there is a tendency to view their policies as not constituting structural adjustment. Both have been atypical in perceiving structural adjustment as a precondition for full stabilisation, not vice versa, even though both accept that initial imbalance reduction is necessary for structural adjustment to be effective. In Zimbabwe, 1984–5 results suggest substantial success in stabilisation and some in structural adjustment, whereas in Tanzania substantial 1981–5 progress in structural adjustment has been rendered less than fully effective by distinctly limited success in attempts to reduce external and domestic resource imbalances.
16. For a programmatic sketch see Daniel, Lipton and Green, in Green (ed.) 1985a.
17. Higher productivity is basic – in the context of most informal sectors in sub-Saharan Africa – to higher real incomes. Reduction of exploitation may often also be necessary, but until they are able to raise their productivity most informal sector employees/self-employed cannot achieve minimum adequate household incomes, no matter how fairly they are paid for what they produce.
18. Interestingly, the World Bank's variant of the 'new conventional wisdom' has never fully lost sight of this point and has recently begun to reassert it. Some of the production oriented justifications of education and health are rather distressingly formulated – they would make equal sense if the 'objects' discussed were machines or cattle – but the underlying point that the productionist case reinforces the human concern one for basic services is an important and powerful one.
19. Contexts – not the sub-Saharan African context. For example, food stamps for poor households might be a fiscally and administratively feasible food security approach in Mauritius but pretty clearly not in – say – Mauretania. Similarly, large inter-year grain storage may make little sense in Botswana which is bordered by two large grain exporters and has a relatively satisfactory foreign exchange position; in Zambia, both foreign exchange constraints and the need to restructure the economy away from mining point in the other direction.
20. This may be unfair to decision-takers. With crop yields uncertain until harvest and the procurement/shipment time required long, it is prudent not to close down food aid (or other import) pipelines prematurely. However, the same cure of minimum grower prices and reserve stocks would fit equally well to alleviate the problems resulting from such prudence.
21. The role of better stoves is controversial. Those developed are with few exceptions so unpopular as to suggest serious design or overlooked side-effect weaknesses. In any case, substituting a purchased stove for three stones to save wood produced (collected) by direct labour input is not a practical prescription for poor rural households to follow.

22. The critique on the grounds of collection cost is far from radical – it is standard Treasury practitioner wisdom aggregated from experience. That on indirect costs to unpaid collectors is not one Treasuries are so prone to make, but is one they recognise and to a degree accept – precisely because their experience is that heavy collection burdens on non-Treasury institutions or enterprises result in protests, the need to pay collection fees and/or very poor collection rates. Many of the detailed fee schemes proposed appear to be ‘academic’ or ‘ideological’ in the perjorative sense – it is hard to suppose their authors have any knowledge of revenue management and collection realities, and on occasion charging the user seems to be the goal in and of itself whether the net revenue secured is substantial, negligible or even negative. Perhaps the author is biased because for nine years he was a practising Treasury civil servant responsible *inter alia* for devising administratively feasible and cost efficient revenue measures and structures.

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