

**Social Development
and
Urban Poverty**

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

22 – 26 February, 1993

**School of Social Work,
Zimbabwe**

Social Development and Urban Poverty

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

edited by Nigel Hall

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Aims and Focus of Workshop

Workshop on Social Development and Urban Poverty

Dates: February 22 – 26, 1993

Venue: Kentucky Airport Hotel, Harare, Zimbabwe

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

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

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

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

Aims of the Workshop:

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

Focus of the Workshop:

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

Papers will be two-pronged:

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

“Urban Poverty, Intervention Strategies and the Role of Social Work in the Framework of Structural Adjustment: concepts, approaches and experiences”

Gabriel L Dava *

Introduction

Development is referred to people because they are the primary subjects and catalysts of the process and they benefit or suffer as a consequence of its success or failure.

It means that although focus on production of goods and services and financial balances are important within the process, policies and strategies of development, there are other crucial and intermediate aspects to be integrated due to the effects of the development process on human well-being.

What is happening with the African process of development is that the strategies and policies recommended are more or less economic and mechanistic in the sense that they neglect social aspects of development: the consequence is an increasing deprivation of the population, particularly those living in urban areas. This is more visible in the programmes of structural adjustment taking place in African countries.

Structural adjustment and economic reform have been at the centre of the policy agenda in many African countries since the early 1980s. In an era of scarce resources, African policy-makers have the task to reconcile what their citizens need with what countries can afford. Although this dilemma must be confronted in any economy, the gravity of the African situation has made the process of political and economic accommodation particularly difficult and painful.

Although some of the programmes of development include social aspects, they seem to be inefficient due to their social welfare and safety-net orientation. This situation particularly affects urban populations whose conditions of life are decreasing day-by-day.

This paper, on the one hand, analyses the implications of structural adjustment programmes for urban poverty and the policies and strategies for urban poverty alleviation. On the other hand it gives general approaches for innovative policies and social work within the process of urban poverty alleviation.

Definition and General Overview of Urban Poverty

Conventional definitions of the ‘urban poor’ – including those used by the World Bank – are based on measurable indices of average household income or consumption level. Those definitions, however, have been called into question for failing to deal with other aspects of deprivation relating to access to water, shelter, health services, education or transport. Nor, it is averred, do conventional poverty definitions fully consider issues of indebtedness, dependence, isolation, powerlessness, physical weakness, disability or social disadvantage.

Drawing upon the work of Robert Chambers (1974) on the perceptions and priorities of the urban poor, poverty might more effectively be conceptualised under three categories:

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- (1) the conventional stress on incomes and consumption, with higher more reliable incomes and better consumption being viewed as still important
- (2) new significance is attached to net assets in relation to liabilities, as debt is frequently linked to circumstances of powerlessness, subservience and exploitation
- (3) attention is given to issues of security, independence and self-respect, with the poor needing better security against intimidation, exploitation and impoverishment.

These are the concepts that we bring to mind when discussing issues of poverty in general and urban poverty in particular, according to which the access to public goods and services, such as clean water, sanitation, health services, education and transport is very important in poverty alleviation because it powerfully affects the livelihoods of poor people.

Thus, if we follow this vision of urban poverty, urban households living in absolute poverty constitute almost 10% of the total of families in sub-Saharan Africa. However, this figure varies according to the numbers of the urban population and the specific conditions of each country.

The perception that absolute urban poverty can be neglected is not true. In some areas it has been evident from even twenty years ago. But it is true that during the the early '80s there was a rapid increase in urban poverty: urban economies have been worse than those of rural areas in terms of production; victims of natural disasters and wars in rural areas have looked for safe areas in the cities; traditional systems of social security have been rapidly damaged in urban areas due to failed economies over many years.

Thus we find poverty in two main forms: structural which is of a more permanent nature affecting a wide variety of groups and transitory as a result of contemporary causes, such as war, drought, economic problems, etc.

Absolutely poor households are mainly concentrated among the following groups:

- those who have only one source of income
- those households with no members earning salaries from the formal sector
- women-headed households
- elderly or disabled persons-headed households
- victims of war, natural disasters and unemployment
- those who receive incomes from the informal sector.

Moving on, there are two important aspects that we should like to focus on. The first one is related to research conducted by the International Labour Organisation that shows that there exist key relation between the urban poor and labour market processes. The core thesis of the ILO research is that urban poverty derives: "*... in large part from the structure of labour market and of the associated labour processes*".

The second is related to the question of whether urban poverty is an urban or national management issue. We believe that urban poverty can be an issue within the domain of urban management. Nonetheless, many urban authorities interpret the problems of urban poverty as a national problem, arguing that urban poverty is a transference of rural poverty from the countryside, and so it is the responsibility of national governments to develop national strategies that ameliorate rural poverty and prevent uncontrolled rural-urban migration.

A General Overview of SAP and its Implications for Urban Poverty – the Mozambican Experience

• *Structural Adjustment Programme: Genesis and Contents*

What is generally alluded to now as the African economic crisis of the 1980s is almost synonymous with a vision of malnourished children, debt burdens, low capacity utilisation, drought, unfavourable terms of trade, international recession and political instability.

The crisis seems to have assumed a character that defies solution. As far back as 1979, the World Bank commissioned a special paper on the economic development problems of sub-Saharan Africa. The paper was to bring out recommendations for accelerated development. The Organisation of African Unity held a special summit on the African crisis in Lagos (1981) and came out with its Lagos Plan of Action, a framework for African economic recovery. Many other fora were held on this issue, but the crisis so far is still to be solved.

The most recent landmarks in this process are the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) being run by most countries on the continent with the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, popularly known as the World Bank.

During much of the last decade, most countries have been running SAPs, which are having far-reaching implications, not only for their socio-economic policies, but also their politics. SAPs are supposed to obliterate what are perceived to be the causes of the African economic crisis and launch the economies of African countries on a path of sustainable growth and development that would prevent any recurrence of the economic distortions.

Because the African economic crisis was perceived as the product of economic distortions, SAPs, at least initially, concentrated strictly on macro-economic policies relating to the removal of economic bottlenecks in the development process. *Ipsa facto*, the question of the 'local political conditionalities' needed for the success of SAPs, and more importantly, the impact of the policy elements of SAPs on internal socio-economic conditions were marginalised.

In the case of Mozambique, the SAP was introduced in 1987 as a government attempt to address the negative trend of the national economy. This programme, internally known as the Economic Rehabilitation Programme (ERP), aimed to:

- reverse the decline in production and restore a minimum level of consumption and income for the whole population, particularly in rural areas
- substantially reduce the domestic financial imbalances and strengthen the external account reserves
- enhance efficiency and establish the conditions for a return to higher levels of economic growth once the security situation and other exogenous constraints have eased
- reintegrate official and parallel markets, and
- restore orderly financial relationships with trading partners and creditors.

As we can conclude from the above mentioned objectives, the ERP is a traditional IMF/World Bank programme of demand-management coupled with overall liberalisation, and it aims to transfer resources and incentives in such ways that investments and exports are encouraged. The main mechanisms of this process are reduction or abolition of subsidies, liberalisation of prices, reduction of public expenditures, liberalisation and encouragement of the private market, including privatisation.

In terms of economic indicators, the first years of the ERP achieved impressive success, if we analyse the following changes:

	1987	1988
GDP	+4%	+5,5%
GDP/cap	+1%	+3%
Rural market	+26%	+16%
Exports	+15%	+2%

Also, several of the objectives of ERP have been achieved, at least partly. Thus, markets have been unified, orderly financial relationships restored and efficiency and cost-consciousness established.

Although the growth figures were achieved through massive injection of external resources – spare parts and inputs to industry, consumer goods as incentives for marketing of agricultural products – and one of the effects of the dependent character of the process is that foreign debt is growing concomitant with the ever-increasing needs of concessional finance to fill a widening resources gap.

The Impact of SAP on Urban Poverty

Heated discussions have been held since the beginning of SAPs in African countries on the questions of whether SAP is a crucial element in the increase of poverty and on the possibilities of poverty-alleviation through social action programmes, in addition to the economic programmes.

On the one hand we have to recognise that poverty in Africa, particularly urban poverty, is not a new problem. There have been changes on its causes and target groups, but not on its spreading existence. Some of the current manifestations of poverty come from the colonial structures, but there are other causes, such as drought, war, limited technical capacity and others. The current levels and forms of poverty include three elements which are not related to SAPs: the first one is the continuous increase in poverty as a result of population growth; the second is related to economic stagnation, decline or disintegration, causing unemployment and making conditions of life more difficult, particularly for the majority of urban households; the third is related to war and drought – refugees or displaced people – looking for security in the suburbs of the cities.

On the other hand, although the points raised above may be true, we believe that SAPs contribute in substantial measure to the increase in urban poverty even if we take the successes achieved in terms of economic indicators. In fact, SAP measures have had a relevant negative impact on the living standards of urban populations. The main social effects of SAP are:

- higher prices in general
- reduction in basic services
- increase in unemployment
- increase in the informal sector, leading to increase in health hazards, accidents, child labour, crime, prostitution, etc
- impact on women: increase in 'time-burden' as they have to care more for the sick, elderly and children at home.

If we go further to the Mozambican case and turn to an analysis of the social impact of the ERP, we find out that as a consequence of the growing number of people seeking refuge in the cities due to the war, coupled with drastic cuts in government recurrent budgets, changes in taxation, elimination or reduction of subsidies, and privatisation of social services, the ERP became a social burden to the urban people, particularly those in low-income groups which account for more than 50% of the urban

population. The food basket is no longer taken advantage of in full by poorer segments of the urban population, simply because they cannot afford it anymore, and the result has been a drastic increase in practically all indices of malnutrition in urban areas during the implementation of this programme.

Likewise, the impact on social sectors in urban areas has been dramatic. Enrolment rates for primary education are decreasing further, from the already low level of 47% in 1986/87, as parents keep their children out of school for lack of money to pay for school books and enrolment.

As far as health is concerned, the increasing charges have forced a growing number of people in rural as well as urban areas to stay away from clinics and hospitals, aggravating an already difficult health situation, especially for children and women.

If we turn to the analysis of water and sanitation, the urban coverage rates of water supplies has dropped from 50% in 1980/81 to 35% , primarily because of population growth. Even considering that the water price is relatively low (but note that the price increased 54% from 1987 to 1988), it is true that about 20-25% of the urban population have to pay higher prices for water on the black market (to those who have the water system connected in their houses). And, taking into account these figures, it means that a great part of the urban population consume polluted water, because they are not covered by water supplies and they cannot afford it on the black market. In terms of sanitation, the coverage of this service decreased from 60% in 1980 to 25% in 1988, due to the increasing costs.

As far as transport is concerned, it is important to note that, as a consequence of privatisation, the price of the urban transport system has increased rapidly, so that it now represents 30% of the minimum salary.

If such an analysis were done for energy costs and other social services, we suspect that the conclusion would be the same: an increase in prices disproportionate to the incomes of urban people after the introduction of ERP.

However, even if we believe that the problem of urban poverty is not only concerned with SAP, there is evidence to show that that this programme has contributed to the aggravation of urban poverty due to the above policies. In fact, within such a framework, those in poor groups easily become the absolute poor, and the so-called vulnerable groups fall easily below the poverty line.

Current Social Policies for Urban Poverty Alleviation in the Framework of SAPs: Criticism

As already pointed out, the SAP has shown signs of some success, particularly economic recovery at the macro-level. But it is clear that SAP policies have also resulted in austere economic programmes and social deprivations.

In recognition of this, special measures have been taken to mitigate the social costs of adjustment in an attempt to humanise SAPs by introducing policies bordering on the welfare state idea for the poorest groups. These measures are mainly conducted to maintain the minimum wage, stimulate employment possibilities and income-generation schemes, improve access to basic services and provide a safety net for the poorest – and they are implemented in urban areas.

In Mozambique, in order to address the impact of the ERP projects by mitigating the effects of the programme the 'Social Dimension of Adjustment (SDA) Projects', which is a World Bank /IMF programme, has been introduced. Basically, this project aims to alleviate poverty through a wide programme of safety net and cash transfers to those in low-income groups in urban areas, and establish some social services such as water supplies, both in rural and urban areas. However the impact of this project is very small given the scale of the problem.

More concretely, the projects intended to alleviate urban poverty are as follows:

- 1) There is a scheme of food subsidies consisting of cash transfers for vulnerable groups – pregnant women and children with malnutrition, elderly and disabled people, women-headed households and members of households with very low incomes. Originally, this scheme was supposed to cover about 60,000 households in urban areas of the country by 1995. Although this programme is important looking at the figure of urban poor people (about 30% of urban population), the effect is indeed very low.
- 2) Another initiative in this framework is the scheme of salary subsidies for civil servants, consisting of an additional payment for civil servants with large households and earning the lowest salary in public services. As well as the food subsidies scheme, this project has reached a very few number of beneficiaries due to the bureaucracy involved in the process and lack of information.
- 3) Some other relevant programmes are being implemented in the framework of the SDA initiative. Thus a programme of rehabilitation of water supplies is being undertaken, and the Institute of Social Security was created, which aims to help workers in difficult circumstances within private and state companies. An important project is the one related to the evaluation of the role of the informal sector in urban poverty alleviation.

We believe that these programmes have some impact, although it is not yet clear if it is significant. However we should like to raise some points of criticism of these kinds of social programmes for poverty alleviation in urban areas. In fact, experience and studies in other countries since the Second World War have shown that there are number of weaknesses in the concept of being able to target small groups of specific groups of people in an attempt to reduce poverty.

First of all, these programmes are concerned with only one aspect of urban poverty: the problem of incomes. Subsidising food salaries and promoting the informal economy is one of the best ways to fill income gaps in households. However, as we pointed out in our definition of urban poverty, it is necessary to look at other important aspects, such as access to water, shelter, health services, education and transport. In addition, taking Chambers' formulation, the aspect of net assets in relation to liabilities, indebtedness, powerlessness, exploitation, and security, need to be considered. These assets are so far neglected within SDA programmes by their very nature.

The second point of criticism is that of the bureaucracy involved in the programmes. The normal situation is that poor people are illiterate and then long and bureaucratic processes become serious obstacles for them. Moreover, apart from the problem of illiteracy, the most important aspect is that poor people on the one hand are weak and on the other hand they cannot afford the transport necessary to get to government offices to apply for their subsidies.

Thirdly, and most important, is that those programmes are not sustainable in the long-term. They depend on donations, limited in time, so that their future is uncertain.

The conclusion is that these programmes are important in the short-term, but in terms of efficiency and sustainability they leave a lot to be desired.

Approaches for Innovative Policies/Strategies and Social Work for Urban Poverty Alleviation

• *The SDA Contradictions*

Searching for new strategies in relation to urban poverty in Africa means understanding that crisis and transformation going on in Africa cannot only be defined in economic terms, but in terms of social structures and actors in view of the constitution of civil society. One important element of civil society is public discourse, including scientific discourse, and this has been missing greatly due to different reasons: lack of research facilities, political pressure on government which made them try to implement policies without discussion or consultancy and the dominance of the international donors. What is at stake is the question of who is the subject of social policy and of the social impact of the economy – and this is the very centre of the relationship between civil society and the state. It should be a two-way process: decentralising political and administrative functions from above, and empowerment, ie construction of civil society from below.

The thesis is that the contradictions inherent in the SDA programmes result from the terms in which the social and political dimensions of structural adjustment are defined, as too economic, mechanistic and social-welfare oriented. As a consequence of this thesis, we find that:

- women are rendered and labelled as vulnerable groups. One of the most prominent features in structural adjustment discourse is the lamenting about women, who, strangely enough, are labelled as vulnerable groups, who are supposed to be the target of all kinds of well-meaning poverty-alleviation strategies based on the welfare model, although in fact women are those who assure survival.
- neglect of the structural consequences of structural adjustment. What is not looked at in the structural adjustment policies are the unintended consequences with regard to access to productive resources and the destruction of self-regulated and responsible actions and social structures. The tendency is efficiency-orientation according to modern rules.
- fund raising/mobilisation of resources at the local level are not considered. In SDA programmes there is no additional fund-raising capacity, apart from the formal systems of social security. It is absolutely unrealistic to assume that poor people, or any ordinary persons, should be able to pay for the consumption of services.

The diagnosis of the situation is that a destabilisation of social systems has taken place during SAP, and it would be more sensible to examine the economic policies themselves rather than to look for complex unmanageable social policy and security systems for solutions.

Methodological Requisites for an Adequate Social Policy

The following methodological requisites of social policy are to be considered in urban poverty alleviation projects:

- consider actors, agency, action strategies, space for change, processes, autonomy and institution-building
- differentiation of levels, responsibility, subsidiarity
- community vs individualisation
- social policy: production vs social assistance
- self-organisation: autonomy vs participation
- social security: strategies vs static income levels and quantitative indicators.

Given the methodology proposed, social work in Mozambique must change to deal with this situation and should be based on a set of guiding principles which will constitute the basis for the equitable distribution of resources as social welfare becomes linked to social services systems through which needs are met, allowing the poor to strive to achieve their aspirations.

The aims of social work might be:

- to improve the material conditions of life of the majority of the population, by:
 - a) helping the poor get access to more resources at community level
 - b) identifying the vulnerable and ensuring their access to existing support systems
 - c) helping groups and communities organise to develop resources
- to maximise the development of human capacity
- to promote individual and collective self-reliance in the context of an enabling social, economic and political environment
- to promote social and emotional well-being, worth, dignity and self-identity of the people
- to build grassroots democracy through empowerment of the people, and
- to assist individuals and groups at various stages of their development.

Community development as a method and as a movement for social transformation is a central feature in social work.

Reference

Chambers, Robert (1983) *Putting the Last First*, Longman, London.



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