

## Issues of Increasing Levels of Poverty and Hunger in Africa, with Specific Reference to South Africa

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The majority of people in African countries, especially in South Africa, live subsistence livelihoods below the poverty line. Poverty is a condition characterised by a lack of basic needs such as water, health care, foods, sufficient access to social and economic services, and few opportunities for formal income generation. This paper assesses the issues impacting on higher levels of poverty and hunger, and suggests an alternative policy framework for improving the wellbeing of the region's poor. In view of the causes of poverty and its predominance, poverty alleviation addresses constraints at the root of poverty. The premise of the paper is that including the poor is an important and progressive step in any attempt to sustain growth, development and socio-economic transformation in Africa, with South Africa as a case study.

### Introduction

The majority of people in African countries live in abject poverty and hunger. About 70% of Africa's poor are rural dwellers. There are many inter-related issues that cause hunger and poverty which are related to socio-economic and other factors. A large proportion of people have very limited access to income, resources, education, health care and nutrition. Poverty and hunger have been a pervasive and growing threat to humanity and the states of the world. Therefore, Africa's poverty is said to be mass poverty requiring more encompassing operational definitions and monitoring instruments with the aim of designing intervention initiatives. The study seeks to identify the current

gaps and to share its experience with government about the existing high levels of poverty and hunger, and to try to bring sustainable solutions to the challenges.

The collapse of apartheid and the emergence of the new democratic dispensation raised hopes for a better life for many South Africans living in poverty. The major challenges facing government are its inefficiencies resulting from poor planning, and vigorously addressing the high levels of poverty and hunger in a sustainable manner. Poverty in South Africa is high and has affected some people more than others; the majority of black people in general and Africans in particular were confined to low income jobs and were worst affected by unemployment and landlessness as a result of policies

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that deprived people of their land, kept them out of skilled work and confined them to urban ghettos and bantustans. However, eradicating poverty and addressing social and economic inequalities left by the previous apartheid government have been overwhelming tasks for the new government. This paper aims to develop integrated strategies and programmes of sound and sustainable management of the environment, resource mobilisation, poverty eradication and alleviation, employment, and income generation for all poverty stricken areas. Furthermore, there is a need to provide all persons with the opportunity to earn a sustainable livelihood, through special policies and programmes directed at rural areas, the urban poor and vulnerable people, i.e. women, children and disabled. In South Africa, many poor households do not have access to service facilities as a result of living some distance from such facilities.

To alleviate poverty and hunger, government needs to identify strategies, programmes and projects that respond to the needs and priorities of people and promote social justice and equity. Moreover, it needs to reflect a strong move towards a more integrated, people-centred and participatory approach to planning.

Poverty is defined as enforced lack or deprivation of material resources of a certain duration and to such an extent that participation in normal activities and possession of amenities and living conditions which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved of in society, becomes impossible or very limited.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, a shortfall in basic resources. A poor person is one whose "standard of living falls below a minimum socially acceptable level." The definition encompasses issues such as basic needs, acceptable social thresholds, norms and traditions. On the other hand, hunger means a feeling of emptiness or weakness caused by lack of food. It also implies lack of food that causes suffering or death.

Poverty is often defined in terms of the income level below which people are incapable of accessing sufficient food for a healthy working life. The most recent estimates indicate that approximately 47% of sub-Saharan Africans live on less than US\$1 dollar per day, and more than 50% of them are from East Africa and Nigeria. On average, poor Africans were estimated to earn US\$0.85 (85 cents) per day during the latter part of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

In South Africa, in particular the Limpopo Province, to contribute to national wealth by the year 2020 could negatively affect the implications of poverty and demographic dynamics. For example, the youth require social spending in skills training in addition to accelerated investment in growth

and development; the reduction of the unemployment rate to below the national average requires a significant reprioritisation of the budget in favour of capital expenditure, coupled with a dynamic economic diversification programme to increase the economy's propensity to absorb labour and stimulate growth; and the substantial opportunities for stimulating entrepreneurial development and employment creation exist in the process of addressing the social problems arising out of poverty, income inequality and disparities in accessing services.<sup>3</sup> Communities are taking advantage of the province's competitive conditions in mining, agriculture and tourism to turn the province's economy. The basic principle of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS) is an integrated and developmental approach that brings together strategies and programmes of different spheres of government towards achieving sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction and unemployment, and contributing to national and international commitments, for example, Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) objectives, the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and so on.

MGD, in particular, seek to reduce extreme poverty and hunger by halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day, and halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.<sup>4</sup>

The poverty gap measures the difference between each poor household's income and the poverty line. Thus, it measures the depth of poverty of each poor household. Three household poverty lines were used in the analysis: food poverty (the inability to provide minimum dietary requirements); basic needs poverty (incomes less than the cost of basic food and shelter); and relative poverty (less than one half of the average household income). Thus, different minimum income requirements were established for urban and rural areas because of dietary differences for communities. The Gini Coefficient is a summary statistic of income inequality that varies from 0 (in the case of perfect equality where all households earn equal income) to 1 (in the case where one household earns all the income and other households earn nothing).

## The Socio-economic Context

### Land rights and ownership

The land issue is pressing for a number of reasons across southern African countries, where they are wrestling with a fundamental question of justice and fairness: How best to broaden patterns of land

use and ownership to include black majorities who were pushed to the margins during the colonial era, without undermining investor confidence or negating the rule of law?<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the southern African region, the land question is commonly viewed through the lens of historic injustice. This is especially so in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia where white settlers, backed by the former colonial powers of Europe, were able to secure great economic privileges when they transferred political power to black majority rule. Colonial legal codes attempted to regulate land rights on privately owned or leased land, and often mixed uneasily with traditional practices that allowed indigenous groups access without ensuring ownership or title.<sup>6</sup>

The situation in Zimbabwe has intensified the debate across Southern Africa by raising the expectations of the landless and increasing uncertainty among white commercial farmers. For example, the lack of a more robust response by South Africa's leaders to the land grabs and wider crisis of governance in Zimbabwe has diminished prospects for foreign investment in Southern Africa as a whole, and placed the continent's own blueprint for relations with donors and investors, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), at risk. Zimbabwe has also demonstrated that disputes over land can quickly turn violent, particularly when they are manipulated for short term political gain at the expense of long term stability. Botswana's President, Festus Mogae, complained that Zimbabwe was suffering from "a drought of good governance."<sup>7</sup>

The ZANU-PF government is set to defy a regional Southern African Development Community (SADC) ruling that white farmers can keep their farms because government's land grab discriminated against them and did not pay fair compensation. On 1 December 2008, *The Herald* quoted the Minister of State for National Security, Lands, Land Reform and Resettlement, Didymus Mutasa, as saying, "they (the tribunal) are day-dreaming because we are not going to reverse the land reform exercise." Mutasa stated further that there was nothing special about the farmers and the government would, in fact, take more farms. It is not discrimination against farmers, but correcting land imbalances, he added.<sup>8</sup> The tribunal has ordered that the government of Zimbabwe take all measures to protect the possessions and ownership of the farmers, and that no actions may be taken by insurgents and others to interfere with or disturb the peaceful activities of the remaining applicants. But Mugabe has always argued that the land issue is racial, and blamed Western countries

for imposing sanctions on his government to punish him for the land invasions.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the causes of increased poverty among female-headed households in Kenya are numerous, but ownership and access to land appears to be a critical factor because several systems of personal law apply, such as the Islamic, Hindu, Civil and Statutory, and African Customary, and there is constant interplay of customary and civil law.<sup>10</sup>

In the South African context, if land reform is to succeed new approaches are needed to transfer more land to a much wider group of people, with the focus on poorer segments of the population and an emphasis on post-transfer support. South Africans will judge the land reform programme by several key criteria, including the amount of land redistributed; its beneficiaries; the speed of redistribution; and the amount of support received by beneficiaries.<sup>11</sup>

### Low agricultural production and poverty

Another major cause of poverty and hunger is low agricultural productivity and output due to over dependency on rainfall. The perennial fluctuations in food availability and almost 'hunger season' due to worsening climatic conditions, i.e. erratic rainfall and poor capability in harnessing Africa's vast water resources for irrigation-led agricultural development, are a worry to the people and many development analysts. As Ghana's President Kufour put it, "...it is unacceptable that in the twenty first century there should be a 'hunger season' seemingly because we are unable to harvest the water resources of the country for food production." Many African countries, including Ghana, have adopted strategic policies to tackle low agricultural production and poverty.<sup>12</sup>

### Unemployment and inequality of income

Due to globalisation and post-industrialisation, full employment is becoming more difficult, and chronic unemployment and underemployment have increased. South Africa's unemployment rate is so high that the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is not able to create enough jobs. Furthermore, in South Africa, unemployment levels are between five million and eight million.<sup>13</sup> High inequalities in distribution of incomes has also translated into increased incidents of poverty.<sup>14</sup>

Income poverty is a lack of the requisite income to acquire a specified amount of food. In many African countries the disparity in income is quite significant, for example, in Lesotho the per capita income of the richest 20% of the population is 22 times that of the poorest 20%; for South Africa the figure is 19 times; and for Kenya it is 18 times.<sup>15</sup>

Levels of income and the nature of income inequalities in the country also underpin socio-economic vulnerability. South Africa has one of the highest levels of inequality in the world, and incomes differ according to gender and residence, and with respect to province and urban or rural locations.<sup>16</sup>

### Internal conflict or civil war

Civil conflict and war are the major factors in the endurance of poverty. This is exacerbated by the failure of rule of law, and such failure drives out the basic economic incentives that lead to better living conditions.<sup>17</sup> For example, Democratic Republic of Congo is in a crisis of prolonged conflict and deepening humanitarian crisis brought about by war and years of political and economic mismanagement which has made this country, home to some 50 million people, unstable.<sup>17</sup>

The following issues also have implications on how developing countries contend with poverty:<sup>18</sup>

- Post World War II, during the Cold War, poorer country governments often found that, if they tried to improve the situation for their people, they could have been perceived as a threat or, worse still, going communist. They may have faced external pressure, external meddling in internal affairs, or even military intervention by powerful nations.
- The powerful nations would, of course, claim this was necessary for world stability, national interest, or to save the other country from themselves but, in fact, it would often be to do with protecting their national interests, such as a secure and constant supply of cheap resources, or maintaining influence and power.
- Dictators and corrupt rulers have often been placed or supported in power by the wealthier nations to help fulfill those national interests, in a similar way old rulers of Europe used Lords and Knights to control the peripheries and direct resources to the centres of capitals.
- This implies that it is difficult to break out of poverty, or to reduce dependency from the USA, International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank.

### Poverty and high population growth

Population growth in relation to the limited and often fragile resource base is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Only a few years from now, by 2025, Africa's population could more rise to 1,2 billion. This high population growth rate will offset any reduction in poor people in most countries, particularly because the rate of

population increase among the poor is higher than among the rich.<sup>19</sup>

### Lack of adequate basic services

Another factor influencing the magnitude of poverty in Africa pertains to access to basic social services. Although access to these services has been increasing over the years, the budgetary constraints of governments have resulted in situations where there are still too many people without access to health care, clean water and sanitation, particularly in rural areas.<sup>20</sup>

Access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities is one of urban Malawi's most pressing problems. Thus, slums throughout the country lack adequate toilet facilities, and outbreaks of cholera and other waterborne diseases resulting from poor sanitation are rife. Furthermore, the availability of clean drinking water in informal settlements is also a major concern.<sup>21</sup>

In Malawi, poor hygiene, lack of sanitation and low quantity and quality of drinking water all contribute to the country's poor health indicators for mothers and children, and impact negatively on the livelihood of women and children as they take on the added responsibility of caring for the sick. Large numbers of the population are without access to proper water and sanitation services. Apart from being socially unacceptable, this poses a great impediment on the socio-economic development of the country due to the impact on health, education and agriculture, among others. For example, up to 25% of schools have no protected water supply and, on average, 150 pupils use one latrine. Fifty per cent of the health facilities in rural areas do not have a proper water supply and sanitation facilities.<sup>22</sup>

### Food crisis factors

The World Bank has estimated that an additional 100 million more people have been driven into hunger because of rising food prices.<sup>23</sup>

### The impact of biofuels on hunger and poverty

The following are ways in which biofuels have distorted food markets:

- Grain has been diverted away from food to fuel;
- Farmers have been encouraged to set land aside for biofuel production; and
- The rise in biofuels has sparked financial speculation in grains, hiking food prices.

The International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that 30% of the increase in the price of the major grains is due to biofuels, therefore

biofuels may be responsible for some 30-75 million additional people being driven into hunger.<sup>24</sup> Other issues that cause poverty and hunger are natural disasters such as drought, flood, cyclones, river erosion and crop failure.<sup>25</sup>

### The Roles of Government, Non-Government Organisations, and the Private Sector in Combating Poverty and Hunger

Poverty and hunger are daily challenges for people struggling to meet their basic needs, and many of them are rural people who live in environmentally sensitive areas with low productivity. This situation obliged government, civil society, the business community and non-government organisations to forge pro-poor collaborations. It is argued that the poverty reduction strategies that have government-led development without the active support of civil society, and the civil society movements without the institutional and enabling support of government, have both failed. Therefore, active participation by communities in the planning and implementation of development policies and programmes is an important requirement for sustainable human development and poverty reduction. Development assistance affirms that sustainability requires the empowerment of people for development that affects their lives.

Several factors are converging to produce more favourable enabling conditions for combating poverty and hunger, such as the increasing efforts of civil society, the rise of democratic institutions, and increased awareness of the political consequences of overlooking poverty. Economic liberation and institutional reform may be reducing distortions that have historically favoured the powerful and, for the rural poor, this means greater access to land, assuming that government policies and market conditions will eliminate subsidies that have favoured large-scale farmers.

Frequently, civil society organisations, governments, intergovernmental, private sector, non-government organisations (NGOs), international financial institutions, and UN agencies are used to pursuing what seem to be parallel paths and objectives in fighting poverty. The 1995 Conference on Hunger and Poverty, hosted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including bilateral agencies, civil society organisations, government officials, intergovernmental organisations, international

financial institutions, and non-governmental organisations.<sup>26</sup>

NGOs and community-based organisations play a vital role in advancing socio-economic rights in South Africa. People receive assistance from these organisations when taking up socio-economic rights campaigns and cases. More interestingly, they use different strategies such as public exposure, monitoring, advocacy, education, public awareness, social mobilisation, litigation, research and training to promote and advance socio-economic rights.

For example, there are a number of organisations that provide legal and paralegal assistance to communities and individuals whose socio-economic rights have been violated or threatened.<sup>27</sup>

Civil society is a sphere of social interaction between the household and the state which is manifested in the norms of community cooperative, structures of voluntary association, and networks of public communication. Norms are values of trust, reciprocity, tolerance and inclusion, which are critical to cooperation and community problem solving, while structures of association refers to the full range of informal and formal organisations through which citizens pursue common interests.<sup>28</sup>

The business sector is socially responsible and willing to assist the government in its efforts to reduce gross class inequalities, and those who are socially responsible should be rewarded with imaginative tax relief and other incentives.<sup>29</sup> Business and informal sector capital must provide the finance for sustainable growth. Moreover, a function of donors- in partnership with government- is to identify the investments and policy reforms that will create an attractive investment environment for the private sector, and foster patterns of growth that reduces poverty and increases employment, particularly among the poor, consistent with equitable and efficient factor markets.<sup>30</sup>

Developing new ways of work is often difficult, especially where NGOs have aggressively mobilised to change government policies. In some cases, the first step is to overcome the difficulty where the term non-government was seen to be the same as anti-government. Therefore, building trust among civil society, government and inter-governmental organisations is the first step.<sup>31</sup>

“December 10, 2006 marked the International Human Rights Day, the international spotlight is on poverty. Fighting poverty is a matter of obligation, not charity.” In observing the day, the African Union (AU) rededicated itself to upholding the standards enshrined in the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights, as stipulated in objective (e) of its Constitutive Act: "to encourage international cooperation, taking due account of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." The AU also wishes to reiterate its determination to take up the multifaceted challenges that confront the continent and peoples in the light of the social, economic and political changes taking place in the world. Thus, poverty is a human rights issue underscored by the fact that all human rights are universal, indivisible, inter-related, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and that all human rights must be treated in a fair and equitable manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. Moreover, there should be no excuse for people to be poor, especially on this continent that is endowed with enormous resources. Hence, poverty undermines peoples' dignity and deprives them of, among others, access to justice, health and education. The AU is committed to achieving the MDGs.<sup>32</sup>

Pan-African Parliament, also known as the African Parliament, as the legislative body of the AU established a Trust Fund with the aim to promote "good governance, transparency and democracy, peace, security and stability, gender equality, and development in the integration of African people within Africa and other nations. It will also support the fight against HIV/AIDS, hunger, and poverty on the continent."<sup>33</sup>

NEPAD is an important economic and development programme adopted by African leaders in 2001 to eradicate poverty and to participate fully in the world economy. It also aims to end Africa's underdevelopment and marginalisation from the globalisation process. The long-term aims of NEPAD are to eradicate poverty in Africa and to place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development; to halt the marginalisation of Africa in the globalising process; and to promote the role of women in all activities.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, UN agencies may also have powers to implement socio-economic rights, such as the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). When carrying their mandate, these institutions also adopt documents interpreting socio-economic rights. On 8 September 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration, affirming the principles and purposes of the UN Charter. Through this Declaration, world leaders agreed to set time-bound and measurable goals for combating poverty and environmental degradation, protecting the vulnerable, promoting and protecting human rights and democracy,

meeting the special needs of Africa, and establishing peace and security.<sup>35</sup>

New partnerships need to build on a foundation consisting of information sharing, dialogue involving affected groups, consensus building, and collaborative formulation of policy.

## Conclusion

Obstacles facing the poor are lack of access to land and inequalities. Much cultivated, fertile land is held by small numbers of powerful landowners and elites, therefore new approaches are needed to transfer more land to a much wider group of people, with a focus on poorer segments of the population and an emphasis on post-transfer support. Furthermore, unemployment, income inequalities and other inter-related factors have been seen as the major causes and determinants of poverty and hunger in this country.

Efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger must be undertaken within the broader framework of the promotion of human rights, in particular economic, social and cultural rights, and the right to development. Combating hunger goes beyond the provision of food and includes structural measures in many areas, in particular education; basic services, such as water and sanitation; health; employment; rural development; and infrastructure. The absence of renewed and bold efforts to promote and finance the implementation of strategies to combat poverty and hunger in Africa, and South Africa in particular, will be far short of achieving the MDGs.

Socio-economic rights give people access to certain basic needs necessary for human beings to lead a dignified life. These rights are also relevant for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. They are important tools for groups who are mostly affected by poverty, and who experience a number of barriers that block their access to resources, opportunities and services in the society.

## Recommendations

1. It is recommended that an effective strategy for combating abject poverty and hunger should begin by focusing on resources, production and people, and should cover demographic issues, enhance health care and education, the rights of women, the role of youth and indigenous/local people, and a democratic participation process in association with improved governance.

2. The promotion of economic growth in the country that is sustainable, and direct action in fighting poverty by strengthening employment and income generating programmes to the poor people. Furthermore, enabling people to achieve sustainable livelihoods should provide an integrating factor that allows policies to address the issues of development, sustainable resource management and poverty eradication, simultaneously.
3. The South African government, with the assistance of and in cooperation with appropriate international and non-governmental organisations, should establish measures that will directly or indirectly empower community organisations and people to enable them to achieve sustainable livelihoods, consider developing legal frameworks for land management, and access land resources and land ownership, in particular for women.
4. Develop strategies to build public awareness and create political will to open up more space for policy reform and civil society initiatives. Specifically, strategies will support information systems, networks and their focal points, and specialised news services concerned with poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation.
5. Undertake activities aimed at the active promotion of food security through national action plans developed with the full participation of civil society, emphasising sustainable production, food at the household level, and the establishment of food entitlements and, where appropriate, food self-sufficiency within the context of sustainable agriculture.
6. The establishment of an international guarantee fund to allow direct lending by international financial institutions and banks, credit unions and cooperatives to civil society organisations, particularly grassroots organisations of the rural poor.
7. Poverty reduction requires agricultural development because it is critical to economic, social and rural development, and impacts on expanded food production in reducing food prices.
8. Enhancing the technology generation and diffusion through the full involvement of poor people, in particular women, in the identification of the research agenda, the innovation process and improving the diffusion of innovative techniques and methodologies.
9. Finally, poverty elimination requires a democratic government committed to sustainable, equitable development, a socially responsible business community, and a politically active, educated civil society.

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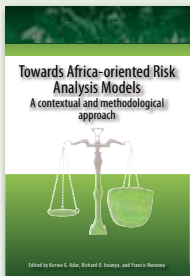
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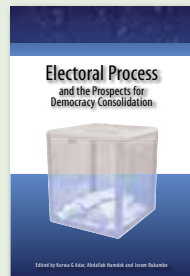
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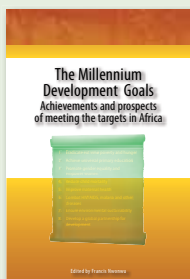
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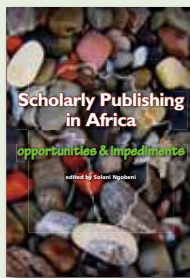
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