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Why is it that books on the environment tend to be so much better presented than books on, say, politics, gender, or other social issues? This, the first offering of SARDC’s environment resource centre, is no exception. It represents a major departure from SARDC’s previous publications, and it also gives the institution as a whole a more concrete image and direction.

The book is presented in three parts. Part One sets out background information on Southern Africa, its physical environment and the way it has been managed throughout history to the present. The first chapter in this section gives a regional overview in the context of related socioeconomic issues, such as population growth and economic development, which affect people’s interaction with the environment. The chapters on history and policy deal respectively with traditional environmental management techniques and the laws, policies and institutions that regulate the Southern African environment today. The next chapter describes the different ecozones in the region – large natural units which are controlled by a set of common processes, mostly climatic, and dominated by life-forms with similar physical adaptations to those processes. The chapter on climate reviews the role of weather patterns, particularly drought, as an important context for understanding environmental issues.

Part Two sets out a series of environmental issues of interest to Southern Africa. The issues covered here are the most topical, selected (as the introduction states) after discussions with:

“...literally hundreds of people in the environmental field throughout southern Africa...mentioned as foremost during visits to all 11 countries, and further highlighted at a conference of environmental personnel from all countries in the region...”.

The issues discussed range from soils and land use, woodlands and forests, and wildlife and protected areas, to freshwater and marine resources, pollution and armed conflict.
The last section of the book, Part Three, looks toward the future. The chapter on global atmospheric changes considers the possible impact on the region of global warming and depletion of the ozone layer, and reviews the actions being taken, regionally and internationally, to contain this. The final chapter on regional trends and scenarios takes the major trends identified in the overview and projects them into the future. These scenarios were developed at a workshop which considered the region’s environmental strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and problems.

As a librarian, I was interested in the book as a process, emanating from the SARDC environment resource centre and its databases. This process offers endless possibilities to other documentation centres, as to how the invaluable information they contain can be made available to people in an easily-consumable format. This work goes a long way to solving the librarian/documentalist’s problem of how to make people use the information they store.

As mentioned before, the presentation of this book is excellent – dare I say perfect? It uses illustrations, maps, and above all, boxes, somewhat like the UNDP and World Bank reports, to great effect, all forming a highly readable and interesting product. The linkages between chapters is a most useful innovation, arising no doubt from the book’s inception in a database.

It also does great service by starting with a clear definition of what, exactly, sustainable development actually is.

The purpose of the book is stated to be “…a tool for decision-makers to use in developing appropriate agendas for action…”, but “…not a policy study”. The level of the language in which it is written would be highly appropriate for a school textbook, and I for one would recommend that it be adopted in the secondary school syllabus. But the level and depth of discussion might be a little too simplistic for the decision- or policy-maker.

It would have been nice to see the issue of gender and the environment awarded a chapter in the book rather than the occasional box. In Southern Africa women are the principal users of and dependers on natural resources in their daily lives: they are the farmers, the drawers of water and collectors of firewood, and also the main victims of pollution, drought and deforestation.

In its final chapter, the book does address some policy issues and future scenarios, and in earlier chapters advocates the use of indigenous/traditional solutions to environmental problems, but it offers no radical new solutions. As Prof Mugadza recently stated, we may need to change our entire economic base in the region in order to confront the problems of drought and depletion of natural resources. Perhaps we should be looking at developing new industries as an alternative to agriculture so that we can import food that we can no longer grow ourselves.
Following this valuable overview of the environment in Southern Africa, we look forward to other products from SARDC’s resource centre and congratulate them on this one.

Reviewed by Anne Derges, Librarian, School of Social Work.


The book discusses the history of social policy in Zimbabwe from the pre-Independence period up to the present time. The book looks at major factors - ideological, cultural, political, availability of resources and regional and international organisations which determine the direction of social policy. The book also considers poverty and inequality in developing countries with particular emphasis on Zimbabwe. One result of poverty has been that “increasingly great numbers of peasants annually drift into urban squatter compounds and swelling the ranks of the unemployed” (p 40) This trend does not apply to Zimbabwe alone, but other African countries are also going through. Different aspects of social policy and administration in Zimbabwe are also discussed. These are rural development, social welfare, social security, health, housing and education. The last chapter is an overview of the above topics.

During the pre-Independence period, social policies regarding the above aspects were discriminatory to blacks. Not only were the social policies discriminatory, they also forced blacks to lose some of their traditional practices. For example, health policies discouraged the indigenous people from using traditional healers. The policies transformed formerly self-sufficient medical practices and made them dependent on foreign medical practices which the people scarcely understood and which were, in any case, largely inaccessible (especially to those who lived in rural areas). All other aspects of life were similarly affected. It was sadly noted that during the pre-Independence period, when the country had more resources, the quality of life for whites was much better than that for blacks, and it was only after Independence that the quality of life for blacks began to improve. Unfortunately the economy then started to go down, hence the introduction of the structural adjustment programme. The programme has resulted in a low quality of life again for black people, and up to now, Zimbabwe is still going through this, with its negative consequences for the majority.

The authors did well by starting with the definition and analysis of social policy. This is vital because definitions of concepts vary from one scholar to another. It discusses factors which shaped the development of social policy in Zimbabwe.
(both internal and external). These include: ideology, availability of resources, politics, culture and international and regional organisations. The book mentioned that lack of resources undermines the importance of ideology as a determinant of social policy. While lack of resources undermines the importance of ideology, it creates a danger in the sense that it encourages dependency – for example, the structural adjustment programme, which does not only affect Zimbabwe but other African countries too. As an alternative to structural adjustment, the authors suggest an African approach, but leave us in the dark as to what that African approach entails.

The book did a good job by concluding each chapter with recommendations. To effectively implement the authors' recommendations, not only in Zimbabwe, but in other African countries, the right technology and manpower are needed. I am aware that lack of resources is another problem facing developing countries, but I feel that lack of technology and manpower are the major problems. Lack of manpower in developing countries is exacerbated by the fact that when the economy of a country goes down, intellectuals migrate to countries where the economy is still better.

Overall the book is quite enlightening on social policy and administration in Zimbabwe. It clearly outlines a wide range of social policies which affect the quality of life for the majority in Zimbabwe.

Reviewed by Mrs Tapologo Maundeni, University of Botswana, Gaborone.


Just a few years ago, Zimbabwe could feed her population and export grain to neighbouring countries. Thus she was dubbed the "breadbasket of Southern Africa". Zimbabwe was charged with the responsibility of coordinating the food security programme in the region. Objectives of the programme were to satisfy the basic food requirements for all people who need it and to eliminate periodic food crises. This meant the need to maintain adequate foodstocks at all times and ensuring accessibility of the food to all.

While the grain silos were full and overflowing with food, there were cases of suffering from what one may call artificial famine. Some people did not have enough food to eat. It is against this background that Alleviating Hunger in Zimbabwe: Towards a National Food Security Strategy is written. The book looks at "a food security paradox" in Zimbabwe where "at national level, the country is food secure, but at household level, there are several cases of food insecurity and malnutrition".
The book is a critique of food production and distribution systems in Zimbabwe. It discusses the food security situation in the country by examining the marketing system and grain availability at household level and evaluating government efforts to ensure that everyone has food. It reviews government-sponsored drought relief and supplementary food production programmes and the child supplementary feeding schemes. In the last chapter, the book recommends how to promote household food security.

Like many other countries in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe has been caught in a vicious cycle of recurrent droughts. The 1994/95 agricultural season saw an outbreak of armyworm in some districts, in addition to a dry summer. The season was thus described as worse than that of 1991/92, then called the worst drought in Zimbabwe’s living memory. Most small-scale farmers did not harvest anything from their fields and many were forced to turn to government for food handouts. Rather than leave individual ministries to grapple with the problem, Rukuni & Jayne recommend a holistic approach to hunger and malnutrition.

On drought relief, the book reports how the information on deserving cases is obtained and how the decision on how much food to allocate is arrived at. Rukuni & Jayne say the decisions are not based on “...available malnutrition indicators or food production shortfalls”. They report that “...there is a huge gap between what is needed and what is provided”. Transport is also a big problem.

On the child supplementary feeding scheme, the book reports that it is difficult to pinpoint specific areas of need as the information at national level, where decisions are made, is aggregated. For example, one cannot isolate “...areas of high malnutrition, assess the primary cause of the problem or to target appropriate assistance to these areas”.

One way of being food secure at the household level is to produce more food. In view of the recurrent droughts that the region is experiencing, it is difficult to produce more or enough food from the land. The authors give a few tips on how to produce or acquire food and store it for longer periods. The book suggests the supplementary food production programme as one way of addressing the problem of food shortage and malnutrition. However, it does not dwell much on food production, instead concentrating on what happens after (enough) food has been produced, that is, marketing and distribution of the food to those needing it. The book critically analyses the situation where the “...large stocks in grain marketing depots dotted around the country do not necessarily translate into grain availability in communal areas”, and advises on how to reduce the cost of government stockpiling and drought relief programmes.

To keep the grain at low prices which are affordable to the poor rural farmer, Rukuni & Jayne propose restructuring of the grain marketing system and promotion of competitive, low-cost rural markets. According to them: “The Grain
Marketing Board (GMB) should maintain its positive functions such as holding buffer stocks to guard against drought and provide a floor price for surplus producers”. On grain movement, they say the GMB should not take grain out of deficit areas, only to be brought back as more expensive mealie meal which the poor communal farmers do not like and cannot afford: “Communal people like straight-run meal, mugaiwa”.

Competitive, low-cost rural markets can be promoted through “...better lubricated rural credit schemes”, developing road networks to link one communal area directly with another so that grain goes from a high producing area to a needy one and not through a town, thus reducing transport costs; promoting better storage facilities and the development of grain varieties resistant to attack by storage pests. Rukuni & Jayne also recommend rural industrialisation so that people can make money to buy what they cannot produce.

On credit/finance for rural development, the book analyses the conditions which led to the development of urban-based industries, but stifles development of rural entrepreneurs and off-farm industries, and the constraints that the Small Enterprise Development Corporation (SEDCO), a parastatal established to encourage development of rural areas and small towns, faces.

It is no doubt that the subject being discussed in the book is important. Equally important, and especially in communication and marketing, is the presentation and appearance of the book. The title is catchy and only a few people will miss the book on a bookstall. The simple language used and the font used makes the book a pleasure to read. The book is packed with facts and figures which clearly depict the nature and extent of malnutrition and hunger in Zimbabwe. It is an important reference book and will be read over and over again. However, the cover is black letters on a white background and hence will get dirty quickly. An illustration would have made the book much more attractive. A stronger or thicker material for the cover would ensure a longer shelf-life with the cover still intact. Therefore, the book needs careful handling. I hope the publishers will consider this when they order reprints.

Policy-makers, especially the Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Social Welfare, students of agricultural economics, parastatals and organisations involved in the production and distribution of food, nutrition and drought relief programmes, women’s organisations and donors, will find the book resourceful. Nations of Southern Africa need not travel the same long road to identify the problems of centralised grain marketing and malnutrition. A leaf from the book will be good advice.

Notes:

Not long ago Professor Rukuni was chairman of the Land Tenure Commission, advising the nation on how to share its most important natural resource, the land. Ronald Watts, in his
article "Donors Back Zimbabwe" in African Farming, March/April 1995, pp 25-6, writes: "(The) man with a vision of how Zimbabwe's agriculture might develop is Prof Rukuni. He is an agricultural economist (and senior lecturer) in the University of Zimbabwe and has recently been appointed chairman of the land tenure commission charged with finding solutions to the massive problem of the communal lands.... Hopefully, the government will take up recommendations of the Rukuni Commission and help the professor to realise his vision of a new type of Zimbabwean farmer". Recently, Professor Rukuni was appointed chairman of the Food and Nutrition Commission to advise the nation on how to share food to reduce starvation and malnutrition at the household level. Addressing the question of hunger may stem the rising tide of urban migration and squatting.

Reviewed by L C Matarirano, Editor: Science and Technology, University of Zimbabwe, Harare.


From Another Place: Migration and the Politics of Culture is one of the few books where the author challenges intellectuals to be aware of the extent to which some of their work is already written and the subsequent understandings pre-formed. In order to progress, perhaps, the most intellectuals can do, is to remain skeptical of available representations, while continuing to ask questions about what, and who, is not being represented.

In this book, Gillian Bottomley examines the role of culture in the process of migration, which she notes is rarely examined in studies of political economy of labour migration. Various perspectives on class, gender, ethnicity and identity are interwoven throughout this discussion of work, health and state intervention in the lives of non-English speakers in Australia, particularly Greek-Australians.

The book explores definitions and understandings of the relations between migration and cultural processes, calling into question the interrelation between circumstance and cultural practice. It is a timely attempt to move away from the limitations of dichotomous explanations of migration, using the insights derived from sociology, political economy and literature in the discussion of cultural beliefs and practices.

There is no doubt that the book is a result of at least twenty years research and teaching. This can be gleaned from the extensive interrogation and critical engagements Bottomley shows in this book in the form of debates and reviews of major existing works on the subject. The book mainly focuses on the developments in Australia, where over 20 per cent of the inhabitants were born in another country and 25 per cent are of non-Anglophone origin. The biggest challenge the study
poses is in developing a contrast between the diversity of the Australian population and prevailing Anglocentrism of discourses and practices of knowledge leading one to raise questions about knowledge and power, as well as forms of resistance, adaption and transformation that can enable people to weave through and across—perhaps even above—these structured power relations.

There is a further extensive comparative research on international migration mainly in Chapters 2 and 3. The framework developed here includes an argument for an international perspective on migration and a comparative understanding of such notions as tradition and ethnicity. The rest of the book concentrates on Greece and Greek-Australians within this comparative framework to allow for some illumination of both ends of the migration story as well as of the social, economic and cultural networks of the diaspora. The author argues rightly, that such a focus enables one to explore the rich resources of Greek artistic work—including dance, music and literature—and ethnographies of Greece, particularly those concerned with gender and politics of ethnicity. The broader aim is to interrelate subjective accounts of migration with the experience of difference. Finally, the account successfully blurs the boundaries between various specialist studies, separately defined according to ethnicity, class, migration, gender, culture and so on.

Most readers of this book will be intrigued by the way “culture” has been used and how also the politics of culture operate as part of the struggle for symbolic power and part of the constitution of specific ways of life. One will note in the chapters 4, 5 and 6 how the discussions on dance and music, and of dowry reveal some aspects of the operation of social power in practices that tend to be regarded as apolitical.

One of the book’s major breakthroughs is its attempt to grapple with available paradigms for understanding the cultural construction of gender relations—specifically for Greece and some of the contradictions and resistances that emerge from anthropological and sociological studies. In addition to this, there are general questions raised regarding gender and power relations, making the book quite relevant for most students and researchers engaged in similar academic pursuits at this point in time.

There is no doubt that a lot of scholars still resist the postulation that culturally-constructed gender relations operate as one of the major axes of social power in most, if not all societies. Men have more formal power than women, and in many cases, the forms of this power are among the most significant diacritical features of a specific cultural formation. For example, Bottomley demonstrates convincingly that the seclusion of women, their submissiveness, the embodiment of power relations in their dress and bearing, can signify the cultural distinctiveness of a society. Under conditions of less extreme political favour, gender is intricately connected to other forms of social relations.
Many people who will find this book useful will no doubt be challenged to read extensively because of the author's attempt to inter-weave perspectives of class, gender, and ethnicity. A good example is shown in the discussion on connections. Bottomley observes that political economists of migration simply identified foremen and leading hands of the working class as "a labour aristocracy" but left virtually unexplored statistical realities such as the implications of simple facts like the Australian working class is mostly non-Anglophone.

The whole import of this account is to stress that assumptions that culture is co-terminus with ethnicity can prevent commentators from examining the processes by which people are incorporated, subjected or mobilised to resist. Ethnicists, for example, emphasise a kind of ahistorical and apolitical culturalism, while political economists tend to deduce action and interactions from structures, under-estimating the significance of pre-migration experience and continuing contact with, and understanding of the world beyond a geographical area under study, in this book Australia.

There is no doubt that this book is of great value to students and staff in institutes of higher learning especially those in social studies and humanities. It is not the type of book one expects to be a cover-to-cover fast reading material. One needs to take their time in order to absorb its contents because the author challenges readers to re-negotiate certain givens in the process of raising new questions.

Reviewed by Thomas Deve, Assistant Editor, Sapes Trust, Harare, Zimbabwe.


Coke and Twaite's findings present the practical situation in which the black elderly in America live in the context of the conditions and factors that affect their lives. Theirs is a comparative study of the experiences of black and white seniors in the States. The findings are chronologically laid out so that the facts brought up highlight the actual situations and life events of the black elderly. There is no question that readers from developing countries will find the information brought up in this book not only to be empirically valid but also a true presentation of what is happening in America among the blacks, as well as in Africa and elsewhere.

Chapter One reflects the situation of the black elderly (referred to as senior citizens in later chapters) in relation to the socioeconomic indicators that were used to compare their lives with white senior citizens. The black elderly were found to live in hardship because of lack of adequate income, poor health conditions, lower levels of educational attainment and occupational status which is a result of the
design of American policies. Their coping capacities depend greatly on the status the society accorded them. The reason for carrying the study was that the number of elderly are quite significant as the life expectancy rate has greatly improved; another reason being that attitudes are generally biased against the elderly as most people regard old age as a form of illness; hence the need to examine their situation in some detail.

In Chapter Two demographic factors as correlates of life satisfaction are discussed. Respondents were asked to rate the degree of their distress, with health problems ranking highest because most blacks voluntarily preferred to utilise their traditional resources of support (families and kinship networks) to being bundled in white nursing homes. This means that they do not have full access to the health services. It is an interesting chapter in which researchers bring out views brought by different sources on how blacks in America value their own elderly.

Glazer & Moynihan (1993) were referred to in Chapter Three as having championed the debate on whether the African culture had an impact on blacks in the United States. Their assertion that blacks in the United States are just Americans were challenged by other authors like Herskovitz (1958) and Billingsley (1992) who catalogued elements like art, family roles, primacy of blood ties, the importance of extended families and the value placed on children as important when considering the influence of African culture. This is a crucial chapter as it helps one to understand why after so many years the blacks and whites in America have not been able to come up with a unique culture.

Chapter Four discusses the importance of the church since it had a great influence on the style of life of most African Americans. An interested individual examining how the church has had an influence on slavery would find this section very valuable as it reveals how religion is rooted in the past when the slaves were bound by the white man's catechism which made them accept that they were inferior to whites whom God had given authority over them. The importance of the existence of the black church is discussed here.

Chapters Five and Six are a revelation of the empirical investigation on predictors of life satisfaction. Factors that predict life satisfaction are discussed using dependent and independent variables in order to establish the needs in life of the black senior citizens.

The last part of the book deals with additional findings which helped to strengthen the research. This helped in concretising the recommendations in the last chapter.

This is not only an important book to gerontologists and social workers but to historians and researchers because facts and information brought up in the research are laid out in a useful and academic way. The findings and recommendations are important and could guide other researchers in the same area of study.

The struggle for democracy in Kenya has created a very polarised society in the wake of demands for political and economic reform from both the donors and Kenyan peoples. Pressures for demanding change are motivated by a variety of reasons and at times conflicting interests. But the reality covered by contributions in this book, generally capture the fact that major struggles have been seen around the issues of economic and political reform, in a context of generally deteriorating economic performance, heightened ethnic tension and often poor relations between government and donors.

As noted by Peter Gibbon in his summary of the book, the studies deal with central dimensions of grassroots development and change in Kenya over the last decade and a half. The first concern covered by Gerrishon Ikiara, Mohamud Juma and Justus Amadi concerns continuity and transformations in the cereals marketing chain, the centrepiece of the World Bank, European Community and USAID efforts during the 1980s and early 1990s to liberalise Kenyan economic institutions on the basis of aid conditionality.

The second contribution by Karuti Kanyinge, examines development institutions, before and after the re-emergence of multi-party politics in 1991-92. The third, by Mutahi Ngunyi, examines the political developments and religious organisations characterised elsewhere as the most important institutions in contemporary Kenyan civil society.

In the development discourse, Kenya is now often seen as a problem child rather than a success story, and from these accounts, ample evidence is provided which allow us to reflect on the convincibility of the donor diagnosis of central policies and practices which preceded economic liberalisation. Ironically, Kenya had been eulogised for most of the 1980s by ‘donor friendly’ western academics who saw it as one of the Africa’s few economic and political ornaments, a country to be held up, admired and analysed mainly in order to detect what might be transferable in its “exceptional” performance.

In the chapter on ‘The Cereals Chain in Kenya: Actors, Reforms and Politics’ the reader is made to understand the politics surrounding cereals production and the marketing chain. The chain as noted by the contributors, is extremely important to the Kenya government since it is the main conduit for the country’s food supplies and also an activity which became central to the national political patronage system developed since the death of President Kenyatta.
For donors, in their preoccupation with the development of a market economy, it became also a source of anxiety because they viewed it as the last remaining significant distortion in an otherwise well-functioning market economy. For the contributors, the main problem arising out of this chain is not only the way patronage has been grafted, but to distinguish “national economic” as opposed to “class-promotional” objectives in an environment where public resources are habitually put to private uses, while the private sector is simultaneously smothered and nurtured in the public sector’s interstices. The complications that have been triggered off by liberalisation created distortions which in the eyes of the contributors confirm that there is no straight path to a free market, and possibly no path to a really free one at all.

Kanyinga’s study lays bare the dynamics of Kenyan politics and demonstrates that it is not the presence, or even the extent, of social pluralism which determines whether democracy can emerge - but rather the type of this pluralism. For example, in Kenya’s countryside - self-help groups, harambee project groups, cooperatives, NGOs, etc - share a common corporate form, whose governing principle is the cultivation of highly restricted and parochial economic interests. Consequently, the articulation of these interests not only leaves intact divisions between localities, but those between decision-makers and decision-takers, between patrons and their subjects, and between the “big” decisions and little ones. In conclusion, the former remain beyond popular control and the population remains obstructed from organising around or in relation to these.

It has become too commonplace a cliche to refer to civil society as the way forward for African society beleaguered by repressive regimes on one hand, and a weak opposition on the other. In Ngunyi’s contribution the question of democracy is placed on the agenda as decision makers are grappling with conditionalities from donors. Ngunyi focuses mainly on the role of religious institutions in the process of Kenya’s liberalisation, but highlights differentiation resulting from ethno-regional and social class basis of those institutions. He further argues that analysts should shift from positing civil society as intrinsically always opposed to the state and raise issues arising from the organic relation between civil society and the division of labour in the social formations in which they are founded on the one hand, and the continuous fundamental pattern of interaction between civil society and the state, on the other. He concludes on a very important note that Kenyan civil society is characterised more appropriately as structurally differentiated rather than as simply pluralistic, and that it has systematically been subject to state initiatives of a disorganising nature - although these have generally no more than reinforced or rationalised its existing polarisations.
This book is well written and offers a very sound analysis of Kenya's problems and reactions of donors. From a political discourse point of view, the book notes a very important point, notably that most donors and western-based scholarship used to believe that Africa's main problem was its flirtation with "socialism" in different forms. In this current conjuncture, the case of Kenya as discussed in this book presents donors as mainly positing that there are certain deeply rooted "organic" features of African social and political organisation which are responsible for its economic and political difficulties. Hence, the shift of donor agendas to include political democratisation as well as economic liberalisation.

Reviewed by Thomas Deve, Assistant Editor, Sapes Trust, Harare, Zimbabwe.