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BOOK REVIEWS


Chris Duke, the editor of this volume, poses the question in the introduction, how can large scale adult education programmes combat poverty? After reading the book one might pose the question in slightly different terms, ie is it possible for adult education to combat poverty? The question as posed by the editor implies more of methodological issues than what the book is actually about. The case studies presented and compared address the very important issue of the actual role of adult education in the reduction, amelioration or abolition of poverty.

Using case studies from Brazil, Kenya, India, Nicaragua, Chile, the Republic of Korea (South) and Sri Lanka, national adult education programmes are analysed within the framework of:

- national context
- Adult Education Agency and Programme
- aims and objectives
- cost effectiveness and evaluation
- important features of each programmes such as personnel and societal purposes, teaching methods and motivation
- nature and preoccupation with literacy
- management aspects of large-scale adult education programmes.

Inspite of the wide divergence of national contexts (from authoritarian and directive like Chile and Korea, through capitalist oriented contexts like Kenya, Brazil, India and Sri Lanka, to revolutionary radical marxist Nicaragua) some common themes emerge as the editor indicates in the concluding chapters. Firstly, the answer to the question posed at the beginning is answered in the characteristic adult education language of continous, not so clear and not very optimistic terms. Adult education has a limited role to play in the reduction, amelioration and even less so the abolition of poverty. In Nicaragua the literacy campaign with its political as well as economic and cultural objectives comes after the revolution has achieved structural changes. In Brazil, the effects of the literacy programme are given as individual rather than social, while in India the adult educators due to lack of training among other factors became even more conservative in the process of implementing adult education programmes. Only in the Sri Lankan case study with its spiritual basis is it concluded with any degree of confidence that the educational process is central to achieving the Sarvodaya hierarchy of awakening and development leading to the welfare of all. The editor cautions, from all the cases, and I agree, “against expecting too much of adult education, especially acting alone in the war against poverty”.

Why is adult education accorded a limited role? The answer is best given by the author of the Brazilian case study who concludes that poverty is a political matter, and by implication requires a political, structural change solution. The important issue of the national context and political will vis-a-vis adult education is given adequate attention by all authors and makes an interesting comparison; witness the almost complete congruence of the political will and people’s desired changes of Nicaragua on the one hand and the strong bureaucratic enforcement of adult education programme designed by the state to achieve state determined objectives in the Susmud
education programme of Korea. In Chile, the changes in the national context after Allende forced changes in the adult education programmes as collective action was drastically curtailed all round. The editor rightly concludes that the national context in political, economic, historical and cultural terms is decisive in what can or cannot be possible for adult education programmes.

Another group of issues has to do with the type of agency (whether governmental or non-governmental), the programmes (whether these are literacy only or literacy plus other components), the conception of and methodology in adult education. Again these are given adequate treatment throughout with interesting variations of the same theme. The editor concludes this theme by agreeing with the Brazilian author that adult education programmes always need to be integrated and linked with economic strategies and with the resources and efforts of ministries. This has an important implication for the Western industrialised school of thought which tends to see adult education programmes outside the ‘system’, as the author indicates.

On the whole the book provides good comparative material on various themes of adult education and poverty. If one were to put the case studies on a continuum of strong to weak case studies (in methodological and analytical depth terms) on the one end of the continuum would be the Nicaragua, Brazil and Sri Lanka cases with Kenya on the other end because of its rather general approach. However, the cases have something unique or strong about them, making all of them worth reading.

The weakness is that the editor rightly suggests that poverty is made up of many ‘building blocks’. However, it would have been useful to suggest some of these blocks for readers to have a clear picture of what levels of poverty are being compared.

Secondly, the international links in adult education are not given adequate treatment in most of the case studies, except perhaps Nicaragua and Sri Lanka. If one traces the history of adult education from Elsinore 1929 to Paris 1985, the influence if the international conferences on the changing perception of, and priorities in, adult education become very apparent especially in developing countries. How are national adult education programmes affected by these changes in perception? It would have been interesting too if a historical time framework in international perspective had been considered in the comparison. Nicaragua of 1979, Brazil and Chile of the early sixties and Sri Lanka of 1958 (the genesis date of Sarvodaya Shramadona Movement) are quite different historical periods in adult education and international development terms. The reader might be advised to read the concluding chapter as it delineates the issues more clearly than the introduction which has long complicated sentences (one sentence is 10 lines long!).

However, the book makes very interesting selective and reference reading depending on what is considered relevant for a particular situation. A Zimbabwean interested in a liberation based national literacy campaign will find the Nicaraguan case study very useful reading. The Kenyan emphasis on the role of adult education on consciousness raising and women would be useful given the multiplicity of women’s organisations and their educational role. The Brazilian Mobral case study and to a certain extent the Indian case study provide useful methodological issues relating to how to evaluate the educational impact of a programme separately from other programmes and appeals. The Brazilian case study also provides an example of the Freirean method coopted in his own home ground. The Sri Lanka Sarvodaya Shramadana provides a very interesting and spiritual based way of looking at development as being concerned with the total human being within a hierarchy which gives the spiritual the top position followed by the moral, cultural, social, political and economic components. Poverty as a product of wealth can be seen in terms of greed and craving, Sarvoyadana therefore “teaches how much is enough” in bringing total human satisfaction!

Reviewed by Mrs O N Muchena, Lecturer, Department of Adult Education, University of Zimbabwe.
Katie Curtin, a Canadian railroad worker and socialist, sets out to answer the question "To what degree have Chinese women been freed from their traditional inferior status?" As she traces the progress of women's emancipation in China in a historical perspective, several themes emerge. These include the centrality of the family institution in Chinese society, the strong link between women's emancipation and the prevailing political ideology at a given point in the history of China, the gains (and losses) made in the long and torturous history of women's emancipation in China.

Using data from secondary sources written by both Chinese and Western authors and records of western visitors to the People's Republic of China, Curtin gives some of the indicators of women's inferior status in traditional society, such as the image of women in Chinese cosmology and society; their minority status; female infanticide; restriction of women's movement as symbolised by the binding of women's feet, especially in the upperclass; arranged marriages and polygamy; and lack of property rights among other indicators. The indicators of women's status were most prominent in the patriarchal family based feudal stage of Chinese society. The family is singled out throughout Curtin's book as the framework and vehicle for women's oppression and conversely becomes the main target of attack in the history of the women's movement in China.

Curtin traces the history of women's emancipation from the early 1800s through the Chiang Kai Shek era up to the Maoist period. In the 1800 period male liberal reformers such as Liang Chi-achap and Kan Yu-wein were championing the idea of women's equality. Early women activists such as Chiu Chin who established the first feminist press in 1907 and was later executed for attempting to assassinate a provincial governor were influenced by the liberal reformers. One of the milestones of this period according to Curtin was the powerful ideological attack on the family structure in the Chinese Renaissance established in 1916. The Women's Association of Hunan formed in 1921 was popularly known as the five proposals movement because they were calling for the right to self-determination in marriage, the right to vote, the right to be elected to office, the right to work and to right to education. By December 1921, women in the Hunan Province had won women's suffrage and personal freedom, women were elected to the provincial legislature. On the employment front Curtin shows, for the same period, women being militantly active in the trade union movement. In 1923, for example, 20,000 women workers struck for a 10 hour working day and wage increases of five cents per day.

During the early Chiang Kai-Shek era the Kuomintang (Chiang Kai-Shek's party) adopted a civil code which endorsed most of the early women's movements demands. However, the civil code largely remained on paper with limited application in rural areas. Curtin only illustrates that the women's movement was inextricably linked with that of the overall political situation in the country. Thus during the period of 1927, Chiang Kai-Shek became very vindicative against women activists. Women's Associations were destroyed and 300 women killed for being caught with short haircuts, a symbol of emancipation.

Curtin's treatment of women under Mao starts with the observation that there were only 50 women in the Long March by the Chinese Red Army, where their roles were restricted to public health and supply corps. According to Curtin's assessment Mao's radical position on the family and divorce were aimed at countering Chiang Kai-Shek's repressive measures. Thus the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) women's 'speak bitterness' sessions were gatherings designed to recount and denounce the humiliations, beatings and rapes of the old system.

The new Democratic China under Mao saw the establishment of the China Democratic. Women's Federation whose objectives were to implement the government policy on women and:
act as a watchdog for lack of implementation or violation of the policy. The policy towards women under Mao was to consolidate women’s gains from the revolution. The gains included the right to vote, women’s rights to property, free choice of marriage, divorce, custody of children, forbidding of concubinage. Apparently according to the author the CCP had its limits in drives against traditional family structures, and did not promote women’s emancipation in as far reaching a way as the Bolshevik revolution did. However, Curtin does not offer an explanation or give reasons for this observation. What is apparent, however, from the information given is that women took advantage of their new gains, especially the divorce laws. In 1950, for example, in Shanghai, 91 per cent of divorce cases were initiated by women. We are not told, however, what the actual number of cases were.

The reader can only infer from the description of male resistance to the implementation of the policy towards women that the CCP had no choice but not to press too far. Male resistance is portrayed in detailed descriptions of incidents such as the murdering of women activists on party missions to implement the policy. The extent of resistance was such that even party cadres “whom the party had never trained in the Marxist concept of the liberation of women were anxious to maintain their male position of superiority in family and social matters and therefore resisted the application of the new law” (p 37).

Curtin argues that it was necessary for the CCP to sustain the significant inroads made by women under the programme of the new democracy. However, once the CCP had consolidated its power, broken the hold of precapitalist village structures, the CCP sought stability. Militant women’s movements were seen as being disruptive. A new line of retrenchment was adopted in 1953 which down played the political role of women, emphasised “dedication to family unity, discipline and loyalty”, making divorce extremely difficult and emphasising women’s economic production role. Thus the role of the family in political stability and economic production became the area of emphasis.

As far as women and the workforce were concerned, Curtin argues that real gains were made but these were uneven. There was no steady increase of women in employment, because the numbers varied with the rate of economic growth, the priorities of various sectors, and shifting economic policies at any given time. Thus when the CCP sought to increase economic production, the liberating effects of being a working woman were emphasised while the home was glorified when women could not be absorbed in the workforce. To enable women to play their economic role social services were provided. The author gives detailed accounts of the type and numbers of childcare facilities in the urban and rural areas.

Curtin argues that Chinese women’s involvement in politics is limited to lower levels and gives figures relating to the composition of the party’s decision making bodies to prove her point. The Central Committee elected at the 8th Congress in 1956 had 70 males and 4 females, in 1969 it had 134 males and 11 females and in 1973 there were no women in the politburo. Those who rise do so through their husbands, not independently, witness Yen Chun and Chion Ching, proving Chin’s point that “equality of sex does not really extend to matters of central importance”. Other topics addressed by the author include women and education, abortion, birth control and sexuality.

The author concludes by recognising accomplishments, but strongly asserts that deep rooted inequalities exist between the sexes. She sees the end of women’s repression through the independent mobilisation of the Chinese masses to “sweep away and destroy the ruling bureaucracy”. As far as Curtin is concerned, “Mao had no intention of leading a struggle for socialist democracy” he just wanted to use the masses “to destroy the political dominance of a rival sector of the bureaucratic caste led by Lim Shao Chin faction in the CCP”. One cannot help but conclude that Curtin is decidedly anti Mao.

The main strength of Curtin’s book is in demonstrating the link between women’s
emancipation and the wider political context, and how Chinese women’s demands were often subordinated to considerations of party interest.

Several times in the book the author seems to get carried away by concentrating on the background political context, to a point of de Quincy type digression, an illustration of this is her lengthy comparison of the Societ CP and CCP. Secondly, given the size of China geographically and in population terms, there is not enough indication of disparities between regions, rural-urban and even strata within the society. Thirdly, it is difficult at times to disentangle the very strongly expressed opinions of the author and the real situation. For example, with regard to abortion and sexuality, Curtin says “of utmost importance to the Chinese women is the question of distribution and knowledge of birth control”. Whose sentiment is being expressed here, Curtin’s western feminist sentiment or that of Chinese women?

Notwithstanding these weaknesses, the book provides factual information about women in China from a historical perspective. The reader needs to always keep in mind the date of publication, and the reliance on secondary data. Curtin’s book also provides a stimulus for comparing women in China and women in the aspiring socialist state of Zimbabwe.

Reviewed by Mrs O N Muchena, Lecturer, Dept of Adult Education, University of Zimbabwe.


North-Western European Democracy as a positive academic social movement is presently entering very deep and unsafe waters over the whole issue of describing and measuring African poverty and suffering. At least that is the impression that can be gleaned from the latest culturally plurastic offering from the International Labour Organisation’s World Employment Programme. Joel Greer and Erik Thorbecke are informing us in this monograph that it is possible to measure food poverty. It is indeed a great puzzle why they think that this should indeed be translated into the fancy equations that constitute their statistical *smorgasbord*, if, to begin with, they themselves are not quite sure what this *food poverty* means in terms of its basic causative factors. Greer and Thorbecke are just a drop in the ocean of European social scientists who have fished in the *terra incognita* that constitutes the African continent. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that in the year that Band-Aid hit celluloid screens, and many band-aid solutions were thought up in Washington DC, that the clearest definition of *food poverty* the reader can glean from this beautifully packaged book is:

“Food poverty is a normative, arbitrary and inexact concept. It is an attempt to measure whether individuals consume enough food or have the means to consume enough food to enjoy a minimum desirable level of physical health. The casual links from food consumption and mental well being are only imperfectly understood by nutritionists and the medical profession and, in any case, are subject to inter-personal variability - even within a relatively homogenous population. Further compounding the problem is the difficulty of measuring actual food consumption”. (p 1-2).

Despite the humble confession of ignorance, the conclusion in this very elegant statistical *smorgasbord* is:

“Maize is grown more efficiently by small farmers than large farmers, and if the government does not actively promote land reform, it should recognise and facilitate the effective parcelisation of large farms which occurred. Increasing the price of maize combined with appropriate complementary measures could be an important first step in revitalising Kenya’s agricultural sector”. (p 139-140).
We have heard of how the technical efficiency of North American mid-Western agriculture came through careful manipulation of the corn/hog ratio. It would be very interesting for a social researcher one day to discover what is really behind the corn/human, or maize/people ratio, that is supposed to cure Kenya of food poverty. Should we be at this stage phrase mongering about food poverty, or should we be talking about the poverty of ideas emanating from world-class labour economists advising social workers in Africa on how best to socially organise labour power. This poverty of strategic thought is constantly displayed in the social democratic naivety that capitalism is not essentially bad, and that if the price is right, then everything else will work out just fine.

The basic social ignorance of the forces that have historically decomposed African labour power, even in Kenya, to force households to grow maize in the first place totally escapes the very otherwise ordered framework of the joint essay. Let it not be misunderstood that we are quibbling about the use of the English concepts, food and the more abstract term poverty or even decomposition, for as David Knight (1981) has written concerning the use of words in science:

"Vocabularies are only a part of a language, as we all know if we have ever tried to write French or German, or even to translate them; with nothing but a dictionary, or if we have ever received a letter written this way. And yet French and German are very close to English in structure and vocabulary; the problems are much greater when one is faced by the complication of the verb ‘to go’ in Athabascan languages, or the inclusive and exclusive ‘we’ of Malay language. It is these characteristics and not the coincidences of vocabulary, that establish relationships between languages, just as it is homologies in structure and not external similarities that establish classes in biology. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the grammar and syntax of the language, and not enough to collect words - only if as with Cornish, one knows the affinities of the language one can get anywhere with a vocabulary alone."

We will not attempt to decompose the coincidences of vocabulary from the natural (hard) sciences and that from the social (soft) sciences, but one certainly comes across many quirks and oddities in this piece de resistance from Messrs Greer and Thorbecke:

"A simple conclusion which can be drawn from the decomposition of total poverty is that even though the bulk of the food, poor households and individuals are found in Eastern, Nyanza and Western Provinces, Central and Eastern Provinces are relatively much better off in terms of food deprivation than are the other four provinces. This is because the amount of poverty in a province depends not only on its severity of poverty, but also on its share of total population."

But surely, what has to be decomposed? Is it the biological, physical regional ‘manifestations of poverty’? Or is it more crucial that effort be directed at decomposing the basic casual factors, embodied in the market relationship.

The six point matrix that underpins the inquiry into food patterns, and ‘food poverty’ seems to rest on the suspended cognition that in Kenya the following social phenomena were observed:

1. The average Kenyan family is large and numbers seven. Large families in Kenya have lower farm operating surpluses, total consumption and food consumption per adult equivalent. Poor households have more children than ‘non-poor households’;

2. Most Kenyan small-holders don’t have much money as they spend more on food and “there is little difference between poor and non-poor households.”;

3. ‘Non-poor households’ have on average more land;

4. Small-holders of all categories planted roughly equal acreages of maize and marketed the same. (Our two professors unanimously agree that the “shares of total crop production and of maize sold and the rate of adoption of hybrid maize is in a partial way a measure of ‘modernisation’ or ‘transition’ to farming for the market.”)
5. Small holders who are educated do better than those who have not had formal education, but the Kenyan educational system, because of high drop-out rates, is socially producing enough 'small farmers'.

6. Only twenty per cent of household heads could find employment off the farm, so that there exists a 'large unsatisfied demand for employment,' etc. (p 11-14).

There is, therefore, nothing that exceptional about such happenings under the African sun as far as socio-economic descriptive trajectories go, so that the recommendations concerning the increased production of maize are hardly surprising. It is also never clear how high employment in Kenya affects nutrition, and other facets of social reproduction.

What would have been of more value in a study of this nature would have been a careful examination of the structural changes in the domestic economies of Kenya, without imposing a priori categories. If 'taste' is such an important variable, clear theoretical statements on the origins of such 'individual preferences' is required, not only with respect to food, but also with respect to collective economic action, and the non-market allocation mechanisms that operate through the territorial social economy.

What is the best unit of analysis for studying changes in African social economy? Can the analyst use the household as a unit of analysis and at the same time articulate the complex inter-relationship between non-capitalist modes of production and the more hegemonic capitalist mode of production and consumption that permeates African social realities. What does the scientist have to do to contribute to territorial efforts to reconstitute labour power? These are only some of the questions that are raised by the mensuration techniques used in social science in Africa, but which are taken for granted in this ILO publication.

Reviewed by Thomas D Shopo, Senior Research Fellow, Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies, Harare.

References


Communities in Crisis, Albert Cherns and Moshe Shelhav (eds), Gower Publishing Company, Aldershot, 1985 (pp 291 US$37)

The various contributors to this book have presented some of the problems and concerns that plague communities in the late '80s. With their focus on 'communities in crisis', the authors examine both the problems faced by recently established 'designed' communities (such as the kibbutzim of Israel), as well as the malaise of post-industrial urban communities elsewhere. Part 1 of the book is devoted to an analysis of community changes that have taken place in Israel; Part 2 concerns itself with contrasting cases of communities struggling to survive: two examples feature urban situations, one an industrial city in New York State and the other an industrial suburb in Edinburgh in Scotland, and there is a rural example from Norway. Part 3 presents a methodological study of workplace participatory research, the quality of working life in kibbutzim, the relationship of the mentally handicapped to the wider community and finally the problems faced by Bedouin nomads in Israel. Interspaced throughout the book are chapters of discussion and interviews which provide some further insight into the articles.
I would like to start by presenting my criticisms of this anthology. Firstly, I found the book difficult to read, partly as a result of an apparently inadequate editorial structure to the chapters. Although the 'discussion' sections between chapters are a redeeming feature of this edited work, and indeed provide a clear, direct and useful extrapolation of the subject matter, there appears to be an assumption that readers are familiar with the entire book at first reading, as references are made in these sections to later chapters. Secondly, I do not feel that the editors have succeeded in bringing together a harmonious grouping of contributors and the reader is left wondering why certain topics have been included - for example the inclusion of a chapter on the mentally handicapped. Thirdly, and most seriously, I wonder why in a book in which the central theme concerns the crisis facing communities in Israel (an Israel which includes the occupied territories), there is not a single reference to the Palestinians and only passing reference to Arabs regarding their use as labour by the kibbutzim. Certainly if we think of communities facing crisis and deep uncertainty, we cannot fail to consider the traumatic dispossession of their land and extreme suffering of the Palestinian people.

Despite these reservations, the book contains a wealth of detail and insights across a wide variety of areas. The widest coverage has been given to Israel, and particularly the strains and stresses affecting the kibbutzim. The Israel kibbut is an innovative, socialist social system, traditionally characterised by small-scale autonomous communities where a degree of equality, collaboration and mutual responsibility has been seen to be important. The basic model consists of 50-150 families in a single community, based on mixed farming, with each community trying to cover all the needs of its members. There is now an estimated population of 150 000 people living in 280 autonomous communities. As the kibbutzim developed in size and complexity, so they also developed umbrella organisations, regional enterprises and services, sometimes in co-operation with family-based co-operative farms (moshavim). In many cases low-skilled, blue-collar workers were employed to take over some of the more menial tasks on the kibbutzim. All this created a dilemma for the movement, as values of uniqueness and autonomy became questionable, and values of centralised versus de-centralised systems required consideration. These problems are left with the reader, although the contributors indicate that perhaps creative opportunities relating to the balancing of community values and organisational effectiveness may lead to new solutions in the 1990s. Perhaps an essential question concerning the future of the kibbutz is indicated in the discussion as follows: "Can you build a socialist society within a capitalist society without losing your soul in the process?" We would do well to ponder this statement in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Further contributions examine in more detail the attempts to increase worker participation in a regional co-operative owned by a kibbutz, problems of managerial responsibility in the regional organisations, and a consideration of how education can be used to bring about community development. This last study centred on a development town in the Northern Negev region in Israel, which in the 1950s absorbed a mass immigration of Jews from various countries of the Islamic world. The chapter is interesting as it outlines in detail how a paraprofessional project team managed to bring about a positive change in community identity by focusing in great detail on the educational needs of the town's children. The use of an integrated or systems perspective permitted the project team to widen the scope of their efforts to encompass social development on a much broader scale.

Subsequent chapters consider the topic of communities under threat and facing crisis. Firstly there is a consideration of a differential experiences of three moshavim and two kibbutzim in coping with the requirements of forced resettlement following the Camp David Peace Agreement between Israel and Egypt. We learn of the confusion, grief, denial, accusation and compensation experienced by the settlers following these political changes; however, we are told that the members of the kibbutzim were able to deal with the crisis more adequately partly as a result of their highly developed communal collaboration and partly due to their perhaps greater tolerance.
for change and adaptation. Nevertheless the resettlement exercise evidently brought considerable turmoil to the communities involved.

Two contributions concern the problems faced by decaying urban communities: these concern Jamestown in New York State and the Craigmillar Estate in Scotland. The article on Jamestown traces the development of a co-operative effort between labour, management and government leaders in an area of severe industrial decline. Poor labour management relations were transformed after a combined effort by all concerned. Craigmillar, a sprawling housing estate catering to the poorer section of Edinburgh, suffered from typical inner-city deprivations and was characterised by despair. This was tackled by the development of a creative community arts programme which managed to provide an outlet for local residents. This in turn brought about a community awareness of local problems, which led finally to community action. A further contribution relates how several deprived communities in the USA managed through community action, drama and ingenuity, to establish their own electricity supply through the establishment of renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind energy, and in the process outwitting the exploitation of landlords and uncaring utility companies.

The prolific variety of this anthology may be seen with two further examples. One chapter describes the process of resettling traditionally nomadic Bedouins in planned settlements in southern Israel. Although political, economic and ecological changes have led to 'spontaneous sedentarisation', most attempts by the Israeli Government to resettle the tribes ended in failure. It was only when neighbourhoods and architectural house styles were designed to cater directly to the needs of the Bedouins (eg large, two-storied accommodation with space to keep livestock) that the resettlement exercise started to yield results. The second example concerns a small valley in the middle of Norway with a tradition of self-sufficiency - yet in decline due to uneconomic production. Following the efforts of a local entrepreneur and outside funding, a local community development programme helped sponsor action research into the various economic and social problems of the community. This generated a self-supporting development process where the local people appeared to take a common responsibility for the future of their own community.

A major theme that links these separate contributions is the contention that once people are convinced that certain conditions are intolerable a dynamic is set in motion that can lead to creative and constructive change. Indeed one of the discussion papers notes that a principal finding was that the success with which communities dealt with their crises depended on their recognition that they were indeed in crisis. This perspective is valuable as it reminds us that people have a right to define their own reality - perhaps to define their own crisis - and that development is something that should be shaped, defined and directed by those who are principally concerned, ie the local communities. Of course the other half of the equation - the structural inequalities, oppression, exploitation, governmental responsibilities to assist the poor and deprived and so on - is avoided, but at least we are reminded that people have the potential to bring about change if they so choose, and even in situations of poverty can create their own resources. As such, this anthology reminds us in a positive and optimistic way that constructive social development is indeed possible, even in seemingly depressing and hopeless situations.

Reviewed by N P Hall, School of Social Work, Harare.


It is a measure of the Botswana government's interest and perhaps faith in social research that this collection of articles criticising its policies is possible. Collections of diverse articles pertaining to a single developing country and based on field research are rather rare these days and, if for that reason alone, welcome.
That said, I found this collection disappointing for a number of reasons. All of the information it contains is at least ten years old (it doesn’t help, of course, to be reviewing a book five years after its date of publication) and Werbner is careful to note that new ideas were already in the air as the papers went to press (p. i). Notwithstanding its title, this collection is not a coherent set of papers systematically examining changes in Botswana’s land policy. Rather this is a collection of disparate papers whose only link is that they all deal with Botswana (and so might better have appeared separately in Botswana Notes and Records). The editor’s introductory remarks appear to have been stimulated by the content of the papers, and thus seem rather to be a concluding round-up than an introduction. None of the contributors takes up Werbner’s points about ‘frontier processes’ and the distinction between ‘incorporative’ and ‘exclusive’ tenurial ideologies. So the editor’s claim that ‘the unity of the collection emerges from the complimentary of the contributions to it’ (p. ii), is, in my view, at best wishful thinking.

Indeed, the title of the collection itself misleads. Werbner’s introduction provides the non-specialist with only a limited and selective guide to the history, content and relationships between the different land Acts addressed by some of the contributors, and little indication of what is to be regarded as ‘land reform’. It does not, in my opinion, ‘explore some of the available evidence on the making of land reform during the early phases of Botswana’s transition from its colonial dependence…’ (p. i). Of the seven papers, only those by Hitchcock and Comaroff are in any way related to issues of land reform. Two, by Roberts and Werbner, deal with the administration of land law and/or tenure in Kgalagadi and North-East Districts respectively and make useful points about the differences between central intentions and local interpretations. Silitshena’s paper, dealing with rural trade in Kweneng District, while interesting in itself, seems unrelated to any words in the book’s title, except, that perhaps, ‘public policy’ — indirectly.

Of the four contributors who discuss issues pertaining to land, if not ‘land reform’, only Hitchcock deals with the central ‘Tswana model’ (in this case, of the Ngwato) so often referred to by the others. The rest describe minority and perhaps peripheral systems (Almagor, the immigrant Namibian Mbanderu; Sutherland, the Yeyi of Ngamiland District; Comaroff, the peculiar case of the Barolong farms), whose specific relevance to any main argument I did not perceive.

Different authors also describe different land laws and policies in their different areas in different time periods, thus compounding the problems of comparison. Hitchcock presents a wealth of useful information to show why the ‘Tribal Grazing Land Policy of 1975 was, in his view, misconceived (though it is easy - but often premature. - to criticise a new policy in the earliest years of its implementation). In contrast, Comaroff focuses on the Tribal Land Act of 1968, and it argues that, in six years, it managed to create very dramatic ‘class’ differentiation in the unusual ‘historical circumstances of the Barolong farms. I did not find his argument persuasive, in part because, like some of his fellow-contributors, Comaroff’s paper tends frequently to the assertion rather than the provision of hard data.

The other two papers dealing with land virtually ignore new land legislation. In a badly constructed paper, Almagor, often contradicting himself, argues for what is in my opinion an irrelevant and distracting theoretical distinction between functional and substantive rationalities among the Mbanderu, who managed to acquire livestock and monopolise the grazing in the immediate hinterland of Lake Ngami. He does not tell us how they managed to displace their local Tswana hosts, nor precisely why they felt threatened by the 1975 Tribal Grazing Land Policy, nor indeed how the displaced Tswana regarded their expansionist neighbours. Sutherland’s interesting comparisons of different ecological zones among the Yeyi do not pretend to deal with any land legislation at all, noting instead the potential for change built into the ‘traditional’ responses to differing production possibilities in different ecological circumstances.

Not being a Botswana specialist myself, I found this collection useful in its detail, which often
overwhelmed my capacity to absorb it: it is a source to return to in the future when further information is required. However, I was recurrently irritated by textual references to places and people that appear on none of the seven maps provided in this book. Moreover, it took me a long time to formulate a (probably deficient) idea of the background against which these papers would be assessed. Surely some concession should be made to the reader whose knowledge of the country's issues is, by definition, less than that of the writers of these papers. 'Land reform' is, after all, of comparative interest even to those who know nothing of Botswana's specific circumstances.

Reviewed by A P Cheater, Department of Sociology, University of Zimbabwe.


Actually this book presents the findings of research conducted in 1977 in one Central African country, Burundi, and its simultaneous publication in English as well as French is a very welcome addition to Anglophone knowledge of Francophone Africa. Perhaps its greatest use may lie not in any value its specific findings may have for policy purposes but rather in the areas of research methods, where it provides another textbook case of the problems of survey research on this continent.

Bonvin provides, at the very beginning, a brief description of Burundi which, apart from saying nothing about the country's social characteristics, is useful, as is his detailed map of the country's communes. He then proceeds to attempt to steer a middle course between the theoretical rocks of marxism and modernisation theory, in what he himself describes as more 'applied economics' than the development of new theory. This application assumes that different districts of Burundi may be ranked on an evolutionary scale in their incorporation into the contemporary international political economy. Bonvin is therefore interested to investigate the differences between Burundi's more and less effectively incorporated areas, in respect of their economic modernisation.

The idea is, in principle, interesting. Its execution was less satisfactory. While asserting that participatory observation would have been 'ideal' (p 84), Bonvin instead opted for a survey questionnaire, properly piloted, finally containing 395 questions, administered to 1 655 farmers in the two interior communes of Ruyigi and Ngozi, and four communes in the Rusizi plain area north of the capital, Bujumbura (where peasantisation had been established under the Belgian colonial regime and was in the process of collapse post-Independence). His reasons for selecting the survey process rested on the excessive time needed for anthropological investigation, and the problem of generalising its results. Bonvin is now wiser, having realised that the survey and its processing took him ten years anyway, and that his results were not only unreliable in many respects, but also had a limited capacity for generalisation!

In the meantime, he experienced research that will undoubtedly have provided him with enormously funny stories with which to regale colleagues and students for years to come. He has realised that the statistical universe from which samples are drawn is, in third world countries at least, seriously defective at both central and local administrative levels, thus often necessitating the creation of the universe before the sample may be drawn, that 'in spite of its size, the questionnaire used in the quantitative enquiry failed to uncover many significant elements of the process of change in the rural structures' (p 102); that university students may be unreliable interviewers and coders, no matter how well trained, especially when they are physically uncomfortable in the countryside; and that officials may mislead about computing capabilities in developing countries, thus leading to enormous difficulties in processing data. There are still a
few verities that Bonvin has yet to learn, however, not least that, in the role of research assistant, government officials would be not better than students (for structural rather than personal reasons); and that the mythology of religious behaviour often reflects outsider’s prejudices rather than reality.

Given the title of this book, it is extremely disconcerting to have no usable information at all on ethnic variables, household structure, modes of land tenure, or the history of the Rusizi plain peasant holdings. (Bonvin’s concept of ‘culture’ is also somewhat strange: see below). One presumes that the normal tests of significance were applied to the variables dealt with, but the reader must remain content (after all of the defects of the survey) with imprecise results, whereby some variables ‘seem to’ suggest, or be correlated with, others. If one is going to use a particular method of investigation, one should at least stick by the formulae of its symbolic rectitude, even while admitting that there are problems!

Of more importance, perhaps, is the fact that Bonvin does not appear to have used much, if any, of the existing sociological works on the Rwanda-Burundi area, in formulating the areas he wished to investigate and the precise questions he wished to ask. It is all very well to pay passing deference to the value of ethnographic work, while ignoring completely its content; and quite another to build generalisable research onto such earlier work. Bonvin appears to claim to have done the latter, but actually did the former, which may explain why he seems to regard ‘social integration’ as consisting of access to governmental authorities and the mass media, and ‘culture’ as compromising religious observance and food taboos.

Finally, in this slim volume there is nonetheless a certain amount of unnecessary repetition of methodological issues. This space would better have been occupied by data tables with their tests of significance; or, better still, by a copy of the final questionnaire (available on request, from the Development Centre of the OECD, but not included in this book).

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This book is one of the latest publications on the construction industry in developing countries. The subject has been looked at for a long time, but only by specialised Institutions such as UNIDO and ILO, and is not very widely known. However, for some years research and books (1) have investigated this subject with a technico-economic approach showing the key role of this sector and analysing States’ Policies and their results. This book does not only that, but also gives us some proposals concerning alternative strategies for African developing countries.

The author show the specific role of the construction sector in the development process and in economic growth (construction output represents often more than 50% of the gross capital formation of a country) and the clear relationship between construction output and economic growth indicated through statistical analysis. She describes the under-developed resources of the sector in some developing countries, namely, Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria.

For the author, those situations are not only due to the poor level of development of a country but are principally a result of the structure of the construction industry and its organisation, characterised by the divorce of design (architects, engineers and quantity surveyors) and production (building and civil engineering contractors), and the system of competitive tendering. It has been inherited in most cases from the colonial period. The effects of such organisations on the cost and quality of construction are described in detail, and also how they could become a barrier to development. She gives several examples, one of which is the case of professional fees for the designers which are usually calculated as a fixed percentage of the final cost of the
contract. Not only do professionals not have the knowledge and experience required to research and develop appropriate designs that are urgently needed, but under the existing structure of professional fees, they also have no incentive to adapt their design.

The role of the State vis-à-vis the construction sector and principally vis-à-vis the industrial structure is examined later on, by looking at what the state normally does and what it should do towards a more rational structure. For example, it may be noticed that "fee-cutting has finally been allowed to intrude into the design process of Britain". Unfortunately, this is not yet the case in a number of developing countries. The alternatives to competitive tendering as well as the improvement of direct labour force organisation are examined very carefully.

The second part of this book is dedicated to two case studies, namely Kenya and Tanzania.

The Kenyan experience since Independence is well described and more particularly the history and development of the National Construction Corporation (NCC). Briefly, the construction sector like other sectors such as transport, wholesaling and retailing, was dominated by the Asian community for historical reasons. To serve its political proposals of 'Kenyanisation' which became in fact 'Africanisation', the Kenyan government created the NCC, with the technical assistance of a foreign firm, to assist African contractors entering the construction industry. The NCC had three functions; helping contractors to obtain work, providing them with adequate finance and assisting them in the actual process of construction. The author, through the historical evolution of this Institution, shows its contradictions and the results 15 years later. The distribution of work between the African and Asian contractors has not changed and in 1983 there were no more than a handful of firms able to compete with established Asian owned firms. However, the State attitude towards the construction sector has persistently ignored calls for 1) an expansion of the public sector role in training; 2) rationalisation of the building materials and components industries; 3) greater public sector control over standards of construction design; and 4) the simplification and rationalisation of contractual procedures. The author believes that the State is therefore to be blamed for the lack of African in Kenyanisation.

In the case of Tanzania, the government has followed a policy of nationalisation, whereby the state took over a number of privately owned assets and itself assumed the role of producer in the construction process. The motivation behind such actions was to obtain for the State a share of the profits of the private contracting industry by adding to the very limited contracting capacity existing in the private sector. Here too, the use of foreign technical assistance has been necessary. Again the policy met with only limited success. The State did create additional capacity in the industry, but this was marginal in comparison to the work undertaken by the private sector. Both cases are characterised by a clear intention to conserve the market structure and competition, without any real attempt to improve or adapt its functioning, which is one of the reasons for the poor results of those policies.

One point which emerges from these two cases but which is not really developed by the author is the role of foreign firms and the relative failure of technical assistance agreements. This is due to the attitude of foreign firms, which could be explored in another book.

In her conclusion the author develops her own proposals based upon Cuban and European experience of standardisation and prefabrication of building components.

The principles of industrialisation of the construction sector (standardisation of components, simplification and repetition of design details, and the rationalisation of construction methods using specialised buildings brigades) have been very effectively employed in those countries. As far as resources are concerned the expansion of local production of building materials through massive investments has paid off.

This process has been implemented before in planned economies in Eastern Europe but also in market economies in Western Europe after the Second World War. These governments...
encouraged such standardisation through incentives and provided favourable conditions for setting up factories for industrialised building.

However, the author recognises that for poor countries the importation of such prefabrication systems as the Cuban ‘Giro’ system in Tanzania has been very unsuccessful. Later she emphasises the point that “whatever the level of technology adopted the principle of standardisation and repetition will open the door to prefabrication of complete facilities or components”.

The thesis proposed and the case studies in this book are very interesting, but in considering the Zimbabwe case (which is not mentioned at all in this book) one must make some remarks. Zimbabwe as a whole, and more particularly its construction sector, is relatively more developed than many other African countries. Although some conditions are also present in Zimbabwe, like competitive tendering and the divorce of design and production, their effects are probably not so important. However, concerning the proposed policy of prefabrication one should note that Zimbabwe, unlike Cuba and West African countries after the Second World War, is not short of labour at least in the area dealt with by the book (non skilled and skilled builder). So there is no need to save on labour-use here?

However, one of the main messages of this book is the need for developing countries to design their own strategy for the development of the construction sector, using, if possible their own resources, and if possible their own technology. The debate continues over how to achieve this.

This book should be read not only by specialists, but also by anyone interested in reaching a deeper understanding of the construction sector, which provides us with one of our basic needs: shelter.

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References