The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at: http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/

Available through a partnership with

Scroll down to read the article.
Book Reviews

South Africa: Wealth, Poverty and Reconstruction, edited by Lual A Deng & Elling N Tjonneland, Chr Michelsen Institute in cooperation with the Centre for South African Studies, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 1996, ISBN: 82-90584-20-2 (p/b) 207pp, Price N/K.

This book attempts to do one thing that previous research in this field may not have seriously attempted to do and that is: present a picture of poverty among all the peoples of South Africa, including the blacks. It is comprised of seven papers written by a group of South African and non-South African researchers. In general, papers present an overview and analysis of poverty in South Africa and the efforts to alleviate and reduce poverty through the reconstruction and development programme. It also offers lessons and experiences from poverty reduction and poverty-oriented aid in sub-Saharan Africa.

The overview paper by Elling N Tjonneland discusses study projects undertaken by the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town’s School of Economics; The Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development; and Household Survey. These projects and surveys present a comprehensive statistical analysis of poverty in South Africa. The author brings up very important facts that: about a third of all households, or half the population, can be classified as poor, and that the poor are overwhelmingly African, living in rural areas, are women and others living in female-headed households. The article further points out that the gap between the rich and the poor has been growing; the disparity between the racial groups is still large; and that the foreign migrants are an unknown factor in the poverty profile of the country. On the reduction of poverty, the article identifies the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as the main instrument of the (Government of National Unity (GNU). It lists achievements such as the school feeding programme which provides free mid-days meals for more than 6 million children; free health care for pregnant women and infants; affordable water supply schemes; affordable homes for up to 300,000 families in rural areas; and affordable electricity supply for many families in the urban area. It does, however, point out that the RDP programme has not done enough to alleviate poverty among the majority of the people, and concludes that the success of poverty alleviation programmes will depend upon a well-performing economy; and job creation and income-generating opportunities.

Revisiting the surveys mentioned in the overview paper by Elling N Tjonneland, Pundy Pillay’s paper analyses the poverty situation in South Africa by using statistical data and graphical representations. Pillay uses six poverty indicators of:
Expenditure levels; Education; Access to services; Access to and use of rural land; Labour market activity and inactivity; and Income distribution, to demonstrate the pattern of poverty along the lines of location of residence, province; race; household structure; gender and age; and employment and income.

Peter le Roux dwells substantially on the RDP and its capability to deal with poverty alleviation. The paper starts by pointing out that the RDP White Paper should have set alleviation of poverty as an unambiguous priority, which it did not. Although uprooting of poverty is said to be first priority of the RDP, it is clearly not the only goal. There are other related priorities such as: delivery of the social and physical infrastructural development; the restructuring of the economy; and the development of human resources across the board. These are sometimes regarded as benefitting more the relatively better-off groups and classes than alleviating poverty among the very poor. No wonder the RDP base document has been criticised by some experts for not being an integrated plan of action, but rather a pre-election shopping list of goals the ANC had hoped to attain once it took over government. The paper further discusses the RDP policies to deal with poverty under the subheadings of: Employment generating growth; Provision of Basic Needs; Social old age pensions; and Mother and child maintenance grants. The last section of the article discusses the RDP delivery and anti-poverty programme, and sets out the following strategies: Affirmative action in favour of the poor; Restructuring of the poor; Establishing appropriate delivery institutions; Spending the RDP funds wisely; and the Existence of a sustainable economic growth and development.

Bill Davies looks at poverty disparities in the Eastern Cape Province. The chapter considers four aspects of the situation, namely: overall provincial context in terms of population distribution; discrepancies between the province and the country as a whole; some indicators of internal disparities within the province; and finally reference is made to some specific poverty-alleviation measures in the province. It is a well-presented chapter with statistical information from various studies being extensively used.

The next chapter in the book is about illegal immigrants in South Africa. The objective of the chapter is three-fold: to describe the condition under which illegal immigrants live, and what is being done to alleviate their lot; to expose the interface/linkage between their presence in the country and the poverty of native South Africans; and to propose strategies to alleviate their problem. The chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the issues in historical perspective in southern Africa. Various approaches have been put forward to manage mass migrations; and the chapter concludes with some policy recommendations.

The last two chapters discuss poverty in relation to sub-Saharan Africa. The first of the two discusses poverty-oriented aid and the second discusses poverty
reduction: lessons from sub-Saharan Africa. Both papers have elaborate discussions on Structural Adjustment Programmes and how these have turned out to be “poverty-generating” rather than “poverty alleviating.”

This collection of papers is a very important study in the subject of poverty and poverty alleviation in South Africa specifically, and in the southern Africa region in general. The issues discussed have been well-handled and it will add a worth of background information to future studies on the subject. However, its handling of the RDP as the main strategy for the alleviation of poverty in South Africa has rendered the whole work rather short-sighted. Poverty is a long-standing problem in southern Africa, and it is high time studies of combating it came with long-term and sustainable strategies which will not only be seen to alleviate poverty, but also lessen tremendously the dependence of the poor countries on donor agencies.

Reviewed by Bright Nkhata, SAPES Trust, P O Box MP111, Mount Pleasant, Harare.

Panos Media Briefing No 16 (October 1995) The Internet and the South: Super-highway or Dirt-track?, Panos Institute, 9 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD, UK, Fax: 071-278-0345, email: panoslondon@gn.apc.org

In September last year I was privileged to be able to “listen in” on one of the earliest “global network academies” – a Virtual Seminar in Global Political Economy. The GPE as it is known, was initiated by a Canadian professor now resident in the United States, and linked students and staff in universities in those two countries as well as such widely dispersed locations as Britain, Mexico, Brazil, Japan – and Zimbabwe. The second GPE dealt with Global Cities and Social Movements: an exploration of theories and cases, presumably looking toward this year’s Habitat II Conference. Through the Internet participants were able to acquire readings, organise tutorial groups and also enter into a wider debate with the whole GPE seminar.

Web Review (October 13-26, 1995) Special Issue on the Digital Academy, called this Virtual Seminar the “most ambitious of these experiments... and the most significant in the long term....the first step towards a university without walls.”

Two months later I had to unsubscribe.

Why withdraw from such a truly ground-breaking experiment? Firstly, I was unable to subscribe to the full seminar, as my institution cannot afford to pay the fees for access to the Internet (we use the “NGO” Email system, ESANET) (1).

(1) For a description of this system, see SARDC’s review of this Panos Briefing dated 9 April 1996.
I therefore missed much of the debate and the detail of the lessons, and almost all of the readings: these were only accessible from a Web site. Our accounts department was also beginning to complain about the sudden rise in our Email bills: supposedly only the cost of a local telephone call, the messages received from the GPE cost significantly more. And then there were what I might term “cultural” factors. Staff at our college did not participate, despite the fact that one of the subjects taught here is urbanisation. This I attribute to resistance to the technology. Another “cultural” factor was that the actual content of that part of the wider debate which I was able to access (though not the lectures themselves) was very “Northern” biased, and “personal.”

Last week I received a letter from the IDRC (an organisation that is much concerned with information) informing me that one of its publications will henceforward only be available on the World Wide Web. I have been denied access to a useful source of information because I do not have the technology.

On the other hand, through the limited “conferences” available to me through Email I have been informed of various issues before they emerge in the media, and of others – particularly human rights issues – which are never mentioned in the more “official” news channels. One recent example of this is the issue of the young woman from Togo who had sought refuge in the United States in order to avoid undergoing genital mutilation. Pressure groups used Email to circulate the address to write to for letters and faxes protesting her extradition, and she was finally granted asylum. Another example of the “liberating” force of the Internet is the concern demonstrated through this medium over the Chiapas uprising in Mexico.

It would seem that the Internet will not empower on a regional level. South Africa currently rates No 16 in terms of worldwide registered Internet hosts. In southern Africa, like the transport routes, so do the Email routes all have to pass through South Africa. The old structures are not dismantled by the new technologies.

The above are illustrations of some of the points raised in the Panos Briefing, which reinforced and helped focus my somewhat subjective “non” experience with the Internet from the point of view of users from the South.

The Briefing, one of a series “designed to foster informed debate on issues of environment and development” is not so much a paper or an argument, but a list of points, a sort of “did you know?” about the Internet. It does not set out to prove that the Internet is either a superhighway or a dirt track, but to provide information.

It gives a brief history of the Internet, first conceived of by the Rand Corporation – a right-wing US think tank and no friend of humankind. It explains in simple terms the how and why (why has it spread so fast?), and it gives some very quotable quotes, such as Thabo Mbeki’s “half of humanity has never made a telephone call.” Mention is made of all the most salient issues, including AT & T’s plan to
“surround” Africa with fibre-optic cable – an issue which has given rise to a great deal of debate: the “pro” (not mentioned in this Briefing) being that this would give Africa access to telephones and significantly decrease that proportion of humanity which has never made a call. One thing which is not quite made clear in the Briefing is the difference between the Net (or the Web) and Email: throughout the report Email is sometimes mentioned, sometimes the Internet, without adequately distinguishing between the two, even at the end of the Briefing under “your Internet guide.” Even SARDC in its own review of the Briefing does not clarify this distinction for the lay person.

Ultimately it will be the policy-makers’ will or resistance to technology which will make it more widely available. The Internet is there, it has only to be made accessible. Governments can facilitate the spread of information, as in Zimbabwe’s AIDS education campaign, or it can obstruct, as in the issue of cellular phones. Part of the problem is the phenomenon widely observed in Africa of the higher echelons of management, those who make the policy decisions, being the least familiar with the technology – often to the extent of being resistant to it. If development is conditional on transforming the economy to a “knowledge-based” one, as in the OECD countries, then such factors will hold Africa back, and the Internet will be no Superhighway but will remain a plaything of the elite academic class.

Reviewed by Anne Derges, School of Social Work, P Bag 66022, Kopje, Harare.


“Management only bothers with us when they want something done or when we make noise over something. They do not care less how we survive.”

Amanor-Wilks and contributors chronicle the lives of farm workers living and working on Zimbabwe’s mostly white-owned commercial farms and the unacceptable conditions they continue to endure. The writers’ honest pens outline the dismal lives of about 1.8 million commercial farm workers and their children who provide cheap labour to 4,500 white commercial farmers who own and control 12 million hectares or 70% of Zimbabwe’s land.

The book relates the hardships farm labourers experienced during the era of colonial rule, moves through their hopes and aspirations for a better life in the liberation struggle and independence phase until the present time. Nine main chapters of text broken with boxes of oral testimony which give voice to farm workers, present research based on past and current legal provisions, the political situation and historical background to show how farm labourers experience life.
The haunting image of the white master who drives a Mercedes Benz and practices rifle discipline reflects the master-servant relationship between farmers and workers, illuminating a slavelike existence for workers.

The book points out that the power commercial farmers wield is based on how produce grown on their sprawling hundred-acre farms makes an important contribution to Zimbabwe's agricultural based economy. This translates into an inequality in access to land ownership and control for workers and the spiral effect, as one farm worker interviewed states, "...we are the driving force behind the firm, but we get peanuts. We are paid a pittance."

The opening chapter, Relations Between Farm Owners and Workers displays the 1990s, characterised by land designation and economic deregulation, as a decade which has pushed farm workers into a deeper abyss of job uncertainty, poverty and distress. This theme reemerges in chapter eight called Farm Workers and the Global Economy, examining how regional and world market forces have worsened the working and living conditions of farm workers.

Chapter two picks up a point made earlier, "The working conditions of farm workers have never been a leading topic on the political agenda," and examines the Wages and Working Conditions for farm workers. Looking at the pay cheques workers take home and how these meagre incomes are useless in relation to the current cost of living, what comes out here is a stark reality of the desperate conditions farm labourers work and live in.

Anderson's voice brings chapter three Amenities and Environmental Health to life. "Some doesn't see his value," says the farm worker, "he just lives like a mombe (cow). He works and eats and sleeps. They just want us to be down down down, until we die."

For many workers malnutrition, poverty, lack of education and health facilities are the natural order of the day. The life of female workers is captured in Female Workers, Wives and Daughters, which shows how women on farms, who are mostly wives of permanent or casual labourers there, are seldom seen as workers in their own right and are often asked to trade in sexual favours for employment.

For most women, life on commercial farms is an ugly web of prostitution, AIDS, punishment for getting pregnant, beer brewing, no education, with widows, especially migrants the most insecure, because they can be thrown out onto the streets once their husbands die, to a life of begging or destitution in cities and towns. Although the most hard-working group, women earn much less than male workers, and under prevailing economic conditions seem likely to be replaced by men as casual labour.

As mothers, women workers can only spend limited hours away from their homes and family and must do farm work by day and house work by night, leaving them with little time to themselves.

In chapter five the growing problem of Child Labour and children living on commercial farms which needs urgent attention, comes to the fore. Children born
and growing up on commercial farms do piece jobs and more serious work during peak season. They do not have schools, have limited career prospects as unskilled farm and domestic workers and are caught in a trap of malnutrition, disease, hunger, poverty and most recently, AIDS.

Chapter six says little attention has been paid to lack of Education for Farm Workers and as a result the large majority of workers, except maybe the younger ones, cannot read and write. High levels of illiteracy among farm worker communities mean many do not know or understand the kind of rights that exist for them and generally feel they cannot fight for any rights. High fees coupled with the costs of examination fees, uniforms, books and stationary, transport, plus cultural preferences for boys means secondary schools are out of reach for most farm children, especially for girls.

Chapter seven explores the lives of the large population of Migrant Workers on commercial farms who originally came from neighbouring Malawi and Mozambique as refugees in search of work. Although many migrants have been integrated into local communities, they do not have Zimbabwean citizenship and as such do not qualify for social or medical assistance. Retired migrants, who are now at the end of their working life pose a growing problem on commercial farms which is yet to be addressed. Single aged migrants, especially women are at the mercy of individual farmers and can easily be thrown off farms, becoming homeless, stateless and destitute.

The conclusions offered in chapter nine show that while the past century has created impressive wealth for commercial farmers, the ugly side to the agricultural success story is shown in how 15 years after independence farm workers are still invisible from Zimbabwe’s social and political structures.

The book notes that, “conditions of farm workers today reflects a huge failure of policy and a distressing willingness of all but a few groups involved in the development of activities in Zimbabwe to turn a blind eye to their plight...The voices of Zimbabwe’s farm workers heard in this study need to be given a platform to influence groups such as donors and to translate individual voices into practical programmes.”

The final section of the book lists seven recommendations and actions for various sectors of society to take up.

In the current climate of land debate and redistribution, this book clearly has an activist agenda. It is a must-read for all those who want to push for change and bring true hope to the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who live and work on Zimbabwe’s commercial farms.

And as the book points out, “It is not just Zimbabwe’s image abroad that is at stake but the lives of more than one million people caught in a terrible trap of labour uncertainty, illiteracy, ill health and immeasurable poverty.”

Reviewed by Isabella Matambanadzo, Freelance Journalist. Acknowledgement to Woman Plus, Vol 1, No 1, 1996, Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre & Network, P O Box 2192, Harare, where this review was first published.

This book provides insight into the world of gay and lesbian adolescents. The book is composed of a series of articles, by different authors, which focus on the development of gay/lesbian youth as they learn to live in a society in which they are perceived as “different.” The reader is given an opportunity to become familiar with a wide range of issues, problems, attitudes and political policies, etc, which can have a profound effect on this specific group of adolescents. Although the book’s societal context is the United States, much of the information and topics presented are relevant to any society in which there are gay/lesbian youth.

The presented material is interesting, informative and easily understood. This fact enables the book to be accessible to a diverse population of interested individuals – such as parents, teachers and friends of gay/lesbian youth. It will also be of particular interest to professionals who may be in a position of providing understanding, assistance, or therapy to gay/lesbian adolescents.

I felt that the tone of the book encouraged mental health workers to take an active political role in supporting issues, problems and societal inequities relating to gay/lesbian youth. Certainly such an approach would have interesting and possibly controversial implications for mental health workers in Zimbabwe.

As a therapist at CONNECT, I was especially interested in two of the articles contained in the book. One, by Mallon, deals with counselling strategies useful with gay/lesbian youth. The other article, by Jackson & Sullivan, examines the impact of homophobia on gay/lesbian youth.

Mallon, in his article, not only focuses on effective approaches and interventions with regard to counselling needs, but also examines factors which may intensify ‘normal’ transitional problems in teenagers. The factors explored include: stigmatisation, hiding and isolation, sense of differentness, lack of familial support, harassment and violence. Mallon takes a brief look at the past and presents theoretical approaches which have been used with this specific population. In addition, he presents a list of suggestions which can be effective when counselling gay/lesbian adolescents.

The second article, by Jackson & Sullivan concentrates on the social and cognitive developments of gay/lesbian youth. The authors show how these significant areas of development are impacted upon by homophobic attitudes, and policies of a heterosexual society.

Also of interest was an article which dealt with the risk of HIV infection for the gay/lesbian youth population. The article also mentions ways in which adolescents could avoid being infected. Even though this particular article was aimed toward
gay/lesbian youth, the information is applicable for use with any adolescent who is beginning to deal with their own sexuality.

All in all, I felt that the book provided a lot of helpful, and appropriate information for dealing with gay/lesbian youth. The references cited in the text and the bibliography included at the end of each article will be especially helpful for those interested in exploring more in-depth information.

However, one must keep in mind that this book is based on dealing with and understanding gay/lesbian youth within a western societal context. In a Zimbabwean context, gay/lesbian youth are an invisible population. Therefore, a number of ideas for dealing with this group of adolescents are irrelevant. For example, suggestions and recommendations in terms of available social and support services simply has no relevancy here at all.

At the same time, one may argue, that the information, at some point in time, may be helpful for those who find themselves dealing with a client, friend or child who happens to be a gay/lesbian adolescent. The emphasis, or at least the tone of the book, appears to lean towards an active political role on the part of mental health workers, which is certainly not applicable to our Zimbabwe context.

Reviewed by: Carolyn B Weinstock, student: Diploma of Advanced Training in Family Therapy, Zimbabwe Institute of Systemic Therapy/CONNECT, P O Box 6298, Harare.


Ahead of the Fourth World Conference for Women held in Beijing, China, the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) published the book From Strategies to Action: A Research Perspective. The timely book has also a timely message: that with regard to women in development the focus is shifting from the strategies to action.

The book not only reviews the progress made in the area of Women in Development since 1985 when the Nairobi Women’s Decade Conference was held, to the 1995 Beijing Conference, but also outlines specific actions that would see women’s lot improved in the next decade.

In virtually all the articles in the volume, two parts are discernable: The first part of each article reviews the progress made in the area of Women in Development since 1985 when the “Forward Looking Strategies” were laid down in Nairobi. The second part outlines the necessary action.

The volume consists of eleven articles covering over five different themes. The
main themes are women and law, education, politics, culture, environment and economic spheres. The book appropriately opens with an article entitled "Research Priorities in WID (Women in Development) Issues in Kenya," by Jacqueline Odhiambo-Oduol. The article briefly outlines priority research issues in Women in Development in Kenya as envisaged by AAWORD. AAWORD (Kenya chapter) is involved in advocacy research, viewed as a tool for furthering women in Development in Kenya. The author of the article identifies crucial research issues as, "research practice, research training, dissemination of research findings, effective utilisation of research findings and consolidation of research efforts" (p7).

In the area of law, Kameri-Mbote identifies and assesses laws that discriminate against women, particularly citizenship laws, civil laws, parental and inheritance laws and criminal laws. She considers the move from strategies laid down in the 1985 Nairobi Conference to action in the constitution of the Task Force mandated to review laws relating to women in Kenya. The law reform is expected to result in the elimination of legal barriers to advancement of women. The author of the paper, however, cautions that, "...it is imperative that implementation mechanisms be ingrained in the specific legislation if they are to benefit Kenyan women" (p9).

Muganda acknowledges that some crucial progress has been made towards equity in education. It is, however, evident that much remains to be done, especially in higher education to achieve equity.

The political front is portrayed in the book to have registered least progress since 1985. This lack of significant progress is blamed on the government which is accused of derailing the women's movement through tokenism, divide and rule, compartmentalisation of women's issues and 'shelving.' Judging from the political status of women in Kenya before 1985, readers would be excused if they consider the article rather hyper-cynical.

The otherwise interesting and informative book is adversely affected by numerous editorial shortcomings. For example the chapters are numbered (1, 2, 3,...) in the text, but not in the table of contents. Secondly, section titles of some articles are numbered (1.0, 2.1...) (eg, in chapter 1 and 11), while the rest (chapter 2 to 10) have unnumbered section titles. Third, names of some authors are preceded by the word "by" (eg, chapter 2), while others are not. Fourth, reference and citation notations are not standardised for all articles. In addition, one article (chapter 5) has no list of references although quite a number of works are cited in the article text.

The shortcomings notwithstanding, the book, to a significant extent, meets the objectives of AAWORD in that not only does it document gender issues but articulates crucial issues in the Women in Development debate in Kenya.

Reviewed by Kibet A Ng’etich, Department of Sociology, Kenyatta University, P O Box 43844, Nairobi, Kenya.