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Editorial

The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was an issue that was raised in the Editorial of Vol 6 No 2 1991. There is no doubt that Africa is in crisis, but there is a great deal of doubt about the best way to deal with this crisis. Many African governments have been forced to accept the somewhat unpalatable IMF/World Bank prescriptions, sometimes describing these as 'homegrown' solutions to their particular crisis. It has become clear, however, that these structural adjustment programmes do not generally sufficiently safeguard the interests of the workers and the poor. These already vulnerable groups appear to be even more at the mercy of 'big business' than they were under previous economic regimes, as the IMF structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) support those businesses and their need to become more profitable, viable, productive, etc. Although SAPs are 'sold' on the basis that they will bring a more competitive edge to business that will result in more jobs and lower prices - this does not seem to be what happens in practice. Where more jobs are created, they are very often exploitative, as in the free-trade zones that some countries have established. The argument has been that in the short run belt tightening is necessary, and the people will have to struggle for that period. The questions remain: Does this situation ever change for the poor? Do the rich have to 'structurally adjust' at all?

The increasing concern over the impact of structural adjustment on the poor, and on the living conditions of both middle and lower class groups, has been expressed in many ways. An interesting recent expression has been a two week workshop at the School of Social Work in Harare, which was held to assist lecturers from several African social work training institutions to learn more about structural adjustment, its impact, alternative solutions, and how to incorporate this issue into social work and social development training curricula. Some of the papers and some discussion of the issues raised in the workshop may be included in future issues of the Journal.

In this issue of the Journal the first three articles focus on SAPs in different ways, generally writing of the West African, and particularly Nigerian, situation. Anyanwu, in "President Babangida's Structural Adjustment Programme and Inflation in Nigeria", argues that SAP has provided "overt encouragement to the fostering of an unregulated, dependent capitalist development model" in which government retains little control of the economy which becomes even more dependent on the mercy of the "advanced nations"

This he argues has resulted in very high inflation rates which have had an adverse effect on income distribution, and lead to increased personal insecurity and heightened social tension. He proposes that a more heterodox approach be adopted, recognising that the IMF/World Bank SAP has "woefully failed". Ekpo, in "Economic Development Under Structural Adjustment: Evidence from Selected West African Countries", also calls for the rejection of IMF/World Bank SAPs, and recommends an alternative adjustment package, the implementation of the Economic Commission for Africa's adjustment package which pays more attention to quality of life issues. Ekpo argues that the present SAPs have led to social and political unrest, partly because the people themselves have had no say in the kind of package that has been implemented. This lack of participation may account for why so little attention is paid to provisions for improving the quality of life of the majority as adjustment proceeds.

This general issue is looked at from the point of view of health services in Alubo's article "Health Services and Military Messianism in Nigeria (1983-1990)". Alubo concludes that the various reforms which were a part of the economic austerity programme, and which were intended to improve the "popular welfare", have escalated the crisis situation in health care - leading to increased nutritional disorders and the exclusion of the majority from available medical services. Furthermore, Alubo makes a very strong point about the contradictions between the rhetoric and practice of selfreliance and sacrifice (for the poor), and the increasing privilege of the elite, including in health care - a manifestation of the continuing inequalities in the society. He suggests that this requires going beyond reform to "structural transformation" for the "true solution to Third World political economic problems".

Although not directly addressing the issue of SAP, Ahonsi's article "Developmental Implications of Early Mortality Factors in Nigeria" focuses on the need to raise general living standards rather than pursue 'short-cut' solutions to reducing high early mortality. This conclusion is based on research findings that indicated that higher parental income and higher density of modern health facilities constitute the combination of factors most likely to bring about sustained reductions in such mortality levels. The Osei-Hwedies, in "Reflections on Zambia's Demographic Profile and Population Policy", restate the importance of recognising population growth and distribution as development issues, and identify some important elements of Zambia's population profile, and the necessity for a population policy.