

POVERTY REDUCTION

What Role for the State in
Today's Globalized Economy?

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EDITED BY

Francis Wilson, Nazneen Kanji
& Einar Braathen



INTERNATIONAL STUDIES ON POVERTY

Poverty Reduction: What Role for the State in Today's Globalized Economy?

Edited by Francis Wilson, Nazneen Kanji and
Einar Braathen

CROP International Studies
in Poverty Research

NAEP
CAPE TOWN

Zed Books
LONDON • NEW YORK

Poverty Reduction: What Role for the State in Today's Globalized Economy? was first published by Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK and Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA in 2001.

Published in South Africa by New Africa Education Publishing, PO Box 23317, Claremont 7735, Republic of South Africa.

Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave, a division of St Martin's Press, LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA.

CROP International Studies in Poverty Research

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Cover designed by Andrew Corbett

Set in Monotype Ehrhardt and Franklin Gothic by Ewan Smith

Printed and bound in Malaysia

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data: available

ISBN 1 85649 952 9 cased

ISBN 1 85649 953 7 limp

In South Africa

ISBN 1 919876 03 0

Acknowledgements

One of the major research projects within CROP, the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty, is a comparative study of the role of the state in poverty reduction (ROSA). As part of the project, workshops are organized in different regions to facilitate the participation of scholars from several countries and increase the comparative character of the study. The first workshop was held in Botswana in 1997, the second was held in South Africa in 1998, the third was held in Jordan in 1999 and the fourth in Ghana in 2000. The articles in this book were presented as papers and laid out for discussion in the first two of these workshops.

CROP wishes to acknowledge and thank the following institutions for organizational and economic support: University of Botswana, Gaborone; Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA), Gaborone; Bank of Botswana; University of Cape Town, South Africa; Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), University of Cape Town, South Africa; the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD); the International Social Science Council, Paris; UNDP and UNESCO.

Else Øyen
Chair of CROP

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Introduction: Poverty, Power and the State

Francis Wilson, Nazneen Kanji and Einar Braathen

What new insights about the relationship between the state and the poverty of huge numbers of citizens do we have as we move from the 1990s into the new millennium? What role can the state play in alleviating or reducing poverty? Or is the state itself part of the problem? Within the context of Africa, to what extent is the social and economic stagnation of so many states since 1990 due primarily to external factors such as the terms of trade and the policies imposed by international finance institutions? Beyond conventional considerations of technical and organizational know-how, what political and cultural dimensions of the state have to be taken into account when considering *how* the state should help shape the activities of the society? What should be the role of the grass roots in development? How is the concept of citizenship incorporated in poverty reduction programmes? How is the role of power best analysed when considering strategies to eradicate poverty? What is the meaning of pro-poor governance? And is it possible?

Answers to these questions cannot be sought simply at a theoretical level. Much depends on the particular form of the state, the environment within which it is operating, and the history from whence it sprang. At the same time, is it not possible to draw insights from specific realities which can be generalized to provide a deeper understanding across a wide range of countries, if not the world as a whole?

In an attempt to provide some answers to these questions, the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP) has initiated a process of which this book is itself part. As a result of the papers delivered and the discussion which flowed from them it has been possible to bring together a volume focusing on these questions primarily, but not exclusively, within the context of Southern Africa as the new millennium begins.

Why Southern Africa? Over the past decade this region has been subject to a combination of changes which were themselves related to major political and economic shifts at the global level. The fall of the Berlin Wall

in 1989 symbolizing the collapse of communism; the increasing pace of trade liberalization marked by the end of the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations in 1994 followed by the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995 and the subsequent downward pressure on tariffs; the further intensification of globalization inherent in the massive increase, during the early 1990s, of unrestricted flows of short-term capital around the world; and the huge acceleration in the speed of information flow brought about by the growth of the internet in the same period, all combined to change not only the environment in which the countries of Southern Africa operated but also the political and economic realities inside those countries themselves. At the same time the countries of the region have been at the forefront of a wide range of diverse attempts involving the state in tackling poverty.

Impact of Global Trends

For South Africa and Namibia the dramatic political changes of the early 1990s were accompanied by the no less profound economic changes inherent in the founding of the World Trade Organization, the huge increase in the transnational flows of capital, and in the information revolution epitomized by the exponential growth of the world wide web. Thus in Namibia, hard on the heels of independence in 1991, came mounting pressure for trade liberalization whose benefits were by no means clear to Africa in a world where the powerful OECD markets of Western Europe, North America and Japan maintained high levels of agricultural protection. And in South Africa there was the remarkable coincidence of the very month, April 1994, in which the country held its first democratic elections being the one in which the global agreement was signed in Marrakesh thus ending the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations and opening the door to the establishment of the World Trade Organization less than a year later.

Following a preoccupation with macro-economic stability and economic growth in the South in the 1980s, the 1990s saw a renewed focus on poverty reduction and social development. Although of course, as Dirk Hansohm and his colleagues make clear in their essay on Namibia in Chapter 9, all macro-economic issues such as trade policy must be carefully examined for their impact on poverty and inequality. The major agenda of many international inter-governmental meetings and UN conferences in the 1990s focused on social and environmental issues. Social policy at the national level, particularly in Africa in countries dependent on aid, has been increasingly shaped by global institutions. In the 1980s the World Bank played a major role in redefining the relationship between the state

and the market in meeting social needs. In Chapter 7 the nature of the dialogue between the World Bank and the state in the formulation of poverty reduction strategies is examined by Nazneen Kanji in her critique of the Bank's policy in three countries of the region. Despite ongoing debates concerning the causes, there is consensus that social indicators stagnated or worsened and income inequalities increased in many countries in Africa during the implementation of structural adjustment packages, promoted and supported by the IMF and the World Bank.

In our increasingly globalized environment, the importance of global institutions has grown, with a wide spectrum of supra-national institutions, such as the UN, EU and NGOs such as Oxfam, attempting to influence social policies at the national and international levels. Definitions and strategies for social development continue to be a locus for political and ideological struggles, although there has been a marked shift away from the neo-liberal emphasis on economic growth and 'trickle down' to reduce poverty. An important critique of aid and its place in the structure of the international economy is made by Brigitte Schulz in Chapter 6, examining particularly the bilateral flows from Germany to Africa.

There is a range of views on the definition and scope of social policy. Some view it in a narrow sense, as state and NGO activity designed to intervene in the market, only when necessary, in the interests of social protection and social welfare. Others argue for a much wider perspective, where social policy is concerned with public action to address all social problems which are brought to national and international agendas by powerful interest groups (Wuyts et al. 1992). There is a parallel debate over poverty definitions with some definitions closely tied to lack of income and basic services while others argue strongly for a multidimensional view of poverty which includes the lack of economic, social, political and environmental assets and resources. In Chapter 8, Blandine Destremau shows how in Morocco the apparently technical question as to the definition of poverty can be used to evade or to confront the existence of vested interests whose analysis is, of course, fundamental to any implementation of effective anti-poverty policies.

A shift seems to occur away from residual approaches to social policy that recommend that limited public resources be targeted on the most needy sections of the population. Although there is no sign of a return to extensive involvement of the state in social welfare, the discourse which seems to be gathering strength is one that recommends pluralism and partnerships between the state, the private sector and civil society. The taxonomy of social development strategies discussed by Hartley Dean in Chapter 4 provides an extremely useful point of departure for understanding the strategies of individual countries in Africa, depending on

historical context, social and political forces and the degree of influence of organizations such as the World Bank.

Despite the shifts, there is still a tendency both by governments in Africa and the international finance institutions to separate out economic and social policies and to underestimate the importance of the linkages. The realm of social policy tends to be confined to social services and social protection for ‘vulnerable groups’ rather than examining the social consequences of a range of economic policies which affect labour, land and other assets as well as the distribution of costs and benefits of particular development policies.

Still, the discourse on ‘good governance’ by Einar Braathen and Alessandro Palmero in Chapter 13 provides important linkages to a poverty reduction agenda. However, the question of how to ‘mainstream’ poverty issues into all other policies has not yet been fully dealt with, and the problems of operationalizing poverty as a key parameter for economic policy as suggested by the World Bank in its thrust for ‘broad-based growth’ has been controversial (see Chapter 7 by Nazneen Kanji).

While economists, led by the World Bank, have recently recognized the importance of social networks, trust and co-operation between people – increasingly called ‘social capital’ – the tendency is to emphasize its importance for economic growth processes and income poverty reduction in addition to ‘physical’ and ‘human’ capital. In other words, economic development is still often seen as a goal in itself rather than as a means to social development – the social well-being of the population as a whole. This is not to underestimate the importance of ‘social capital’ nor the concern that norms of reciprocity and sharing have been undermined by economic stress. Rather, it is to point out the danger of using ‘social capital’ as a new ‘magic bullet’ or missing ingredient for poverty reduction when the experience of the last few decades should have taught us that no such bullets exist!

All this shows that poverty is inextricably and structurally entwined with dimensions of power at the national and international levels. The role of the state cannot be glossed over in any analysis or action that seeks to move further in dealing with poverty reduction. But in any consideration of power or of the state it is necessary to understand the history and the particularities of each specific context.

Southern Africa: Differences and Commonalities

Table 1.1 helps to summarize some of the basic facts about the fourteen countries bound, albeit loosely, by their membership of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).