

Chapter 12

Anglophone West Africa: Poverty Without Research

Dayo Akeredolu-Ale

The coverage of this review

Only two countries of Anglophone West Africa, namely Nigeria and Ghana, are covered in some depth. Incidentally, these two countries together account for over 94 per cent of the total estimated population of Anglophone West Africa. However, certain indicators (notably, life expectancy at birth, infant mortality rate, under 5 years mortality rate, and percentage of adult population literate) seem to suggest that the poverty pattern in the three countries not covered in depth (Sierra Leone, Liberia and The Gambia) may be significantly different from that in either or both of Nigeria and Ghana.

Profiles of poverty research in Anglophone West Africa

Introduction

For this sub-region, 1983 represents a rough but meaningful demarcation for assessing poverty research. Whatever poverty or poverty-related research was done before that year reflected above all the perceptions, development strategies, and priorities of the governments of the countries concerned and the intellectual perspectives of their research communities. Research after 1983 reflects, very largely, the effects and exigencies of economic reform programmes imposed from outside in the context of economic and political globalization.

The demarcation is particularly meaningful because globalization here represents a definite move to establish and institutionalize in the countries concerned the core values of economic

and political liberalism, as well as the orientations and institutional tendencies that go with them. Thus, concepts of poverty, theories of poverty, attitudes and approaches to poverty reduction, as well as the orientations and trajectory of poverty research itself – all these are now crystallizing in these countries as integral parts of the agenda of global economic and political liberalization.

Nigeria

Scope of poverty research and data situation

The 1975 Annual Conference of the Nigerian Economic Society (NES), reported in the book, *Poverty in Nigeria* (NES 1975), represents a watershed in the history of poverty research in Nigeria because it raised many important questions regarding the poverty situation in the country and indicated an agenda for future work on the subject. Also, in the context of mainstream public administration, the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) had been involved in the conduct of household surveys since the early 1950s and had formally launched the National Integrated Survey of Households (NISH) in June 1980 under the National Household Surveys Capability Programme (NHSCP) sponsored by the United Nations.

Thus, to some extent, poverty had been indicated for the research agenda of the academic community by 1975. By 1980, the FOS had firmly embarked upon a special programme to generate data that could be used for poverty research. However, the truth is that very few, if any, further empirical studies of poverty have been done in Nigeria since the 1975 NES conference, though there has been some further academic research on the related subjects of income distribution and social service distribution. The FOS has also pressed on with the NISH and generated a vast amount of data, for example, on household structure, household economic–production activities, household income and expenditure, employment, health/nutrition, and housing conditions.

NISH, as the details provided in Table 12.1 show, is designed to be a comprehensive system of national economic, social, and demographic statistics. As such, an effective NISH programme will constitute a very rich source of systematic data for the study and analysis of poverty patterns.

From the information available from each module, the data generated by the following could be very relevant in poverty research:

Table 12.1 NISH modules and their implementation, 1980/81–1992/93

Survey Module													
1. General Household Survey (GHS)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2. National Consumer Survey (NCS)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					x ^a
3. Rural Agricultural Sample Survey (RASS)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4. Health and Nutritional Status Survey (HANSS)						x							
5. Survey of Housing Status (SHS)						x							
6. Labour Force Survey (LFS)			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
7. National Agricultural Sample Census (NASC)													
8. Survey of Internal Migration									x				
9. Survey of Household Enterprises (SHE)										x			
10. National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS)												x	
11. Consumer Shuttle Survey													x
12. Family Planning Survey													x

Source: Compiled from Federal Republic of Nigeria (1992: Tables on pp. 2 and 10).

Notes:

x = Module implemented.

^aThis survey, which ought to have come up in 1990/91, was postponed. Fieldwork began in 1992.

- GHS, which generates basic data on demographic characteristics, education, employment, health, housing, household enterprise, income, etc. from each individual member of sampled households.
- NCS, which generates basic data on consumption patterns.
- NDHS, which generates basic data on a wide range of relevant variables, including housing characteristics, household durable goods, infant and child mortality, prevalence of certain

diseases, access to certain health services, household population structure, household composition, current/total fertility rate, school enrolment, and so on.

- SHE, which generates basic data on types of household enterprises as well as purchases, receipts, and number of persons engaged by such enterprises.

These particular modules seem to have done fairly well in terms of the regularity with which the surveys relating to them have been conducted. The GHS has been conducted every year since 1980/81. The NCS was conducted every year from 1980/81 to 1985/86. Now it is planned to be done on a five-yearly basis; the 1990/91 survey was postponed to 1992/93 and the next survey is scheduled for 1997/98. The NDHS was conducted for the first time in 1990 and the repeat, which is planned for 1995/96, is expected to cover the general health status of the population even more fully than was done in the 1990 survey. The SHE was run as a component of the National Census of Industries and Businesses (NCIB) in 1988/89, but the NISH 1993–98 work programme envisaged a strong SHE component of GHS in 1994/95 in what FOS expected to be “a major contribution to the study of the informal sector”.

There are, however, certain important operational problems that must have implications for the suitability of FOS-based NISH as a possible major source of data for poverty research. Among such problems are the recent reductions in the sample size, principally to reduce the cost of data collection, the pile-up of field data awaiting analysis, and the resulting delay of publications.

Concepts, theoretical orientations, and major findings

Poverty as such did not feature prominently or consistently in Nigeria before 1975, either as an important issue of public policy or as a subject of serious academic research. In fact, the 1975 NES conference remains the only forum to date at which poverty in Nigeria has been discussed seriously as a distinct subject of academic enquiry and as a distinct issue of public policy.

The conference examined the questions of the definition and identification of poverty, and the availability and quality of data required for testing whatever hypotheses there are regarding causation, as well as for assessing the impact of poverty-reduction policies and measures.

With respect to the definition of poverty, the conference noted that poverty is a complex phenomenon, often not amenable to objective definition or assessment. It noted also the need to

examine critically the validity and relevance of existing methods by which the incidence of poverty is commonly determined. Even more specifically, it was argued that the concept of poverty is largely independent of and stretches well beyond that of personal income and expenditure; that "a full and proper appreciation of poverty within a society must be seen in the context of access to all forms of resources and facilities provided by or within a nation" (Aboyade 1975: 31). It was also argued that the appropriate research procedure would be a statistical survey that had as little perception of a "poverty line" as possible, but included as many as possible of the socioeconomic variables that are likely to be important for analytical and policy controls.

Furthermore, the conference identified a possible alternative to the poverty-line approach, similar to Galbraith's "island" and "case" types (Aboyade 1975: 34); it stressed the need to recognize a distinct urban and spatio-cultural dimension to the concept of poverty (Mabogunje 1975: 71); it considered an outline of a possible theoretical framework for the systematic study of poverty; and it identified many probable causes of poverty in Nigeria, such as the slow rate of economic growth, the exclusion of large segments of the population from the processes and benefits of growth, market imperfections that discriminate systematically against low-income groups (Edoziem 1975: 38-41), and a high degree of income/wealth inequalities that the power structure has tended to sustain and exacerbate (Akeredolu-Ale 1975: esp. 55-8; Onimode 1975: 335-48; and Abubakar 1975: 177-90). In all this, social stratification seems to be of critical importance. The established structures of inequality (economic, political, and social) reproduce and determine the life chances of particular groups and individuals.

At least four main factors have been reported repeatedly as explanations of widespread poverty (mass poverty) and of its persistence in Nigeria: the poor growth performance of the national economy; non-participation of the poor in the limited economic growth processes available; inadequate public policies; and national economic disabilities associated with dependency. And, of course, many other lower-order factors have been reported as explanations of each of these main causes of mass poverty.

However, given the characteristics of the studies and data on which these findings are based, the findings themselves can only be regarded as tentative and only as a possible basis for hypotheses to be tested more rigorously in future studies. There has been no specific anti-poverty focus in public policy, and this has

adversely affected the growth and quality of poverty research. Consequently, the findings on poverty summarized above have been drawn for the most part from limited case studies and from the analysis of secondary and partial data, rather than from hard primary data derived from empirical studies of the country as a whole.

In fact, since 1980 there have been no empirical studies of poverty as such covering the whole country. The very few poverty studies identified have, typically, been case studies dealing with some particular aspect, none of them being recent. The studies available on income distribution are hardly better. For instance, the 1975 NES conference papers on income distribution were based on research already completed during 1975 or earlier, the Bienen and Diejomaoh papers (1981) were based on research already completed by 1979, and, even though the FOS had conducted the NISH/GHS every year since 1980/81 (as already indicated), the results of all GHSs since 1986/87 are yet to be processed or published, except for the Preliminary Report of the 1991/92 survey, which was published in December 1992.

On the whole, six particular research themes have received some attention: general poverty (or mass poverty); urban poverty; rural poverty; interpersonal income distribution; inter-household income distribution; and possible remedies to poverty. However, given the limitations of the data on which the relevant studies and findings have been based, both poverty and income-distribution research in Nigeria remain largely exploratory and tentative.

Ghana

Scope of poverty research and data situation

The study of poverty as a distinct phenomenon has featured more clearly and more prominently in Ghana than in any other country covered by this review. There has been a more deliberate focus on the poverty situation in the country in the context of both academic and policy research. Thus, unlike in Nigeria, it is possible to identify a number of empirical studies in Ghana that have focused on poverty and that have raised and addressed some of the methodological issues of poverty research, including concepts, theoretical approaches, data, and policy implications. The particular studies on which the review presented in this section are based are the earlier set of studies (namely, Boateng et al. 1989; Brown 1979, 1984; Dei 1992; Ghana Statistical Service 1994; ISSER 1983).

The focus of most of the earlier studies was on the regional dimension of poverty, especially rural-urban and interregional differences. Indeed, some of these studies were, strictly speaking, not poverty studies as such. They were studies of the situation of uneven development in Ghana, a situation that was presumed to correspond to differences in the incidence of poverty. For example, Ewusi's 1976 report on "Disparities in levels of regional development in Ghana" belongs in this category. So does Brown's 1984 study, entitled, rather tantalisingly, *Social Structure and Poverty in Selected Rural Communities in Ghana*, its title and conclusions on the poverty situation notwithstanding.

Brown's 1979 study, based mainly on the analysis of secondary data (census, school enrolment figures, public expenditure, etc.), examined the phenomenon of marginalization, especially the exclusion of rural areas from natural resources and the decision making processes of the country. The "five basic elements of social consumption, namely, education, health care, housing, water and electricity", were all said to be "social services that take the lion's share of government expenditure in the social sector" and "the main areas of social consumption in which the poor feel most deprived". Also identified and examined in the study were processes that tended to reinforce urban privileges, such as the regressive tax system, which was also confiscatory in effect as far as cocoa producers were concerned, and the pricing of food, which kept the terms of trade more or less permanently in favour of the urban areas.

In his 1984 paper, Ewusi analysed the income data of the 1974 National Household Budget Survey and, based on this, attempted to estimate the patterns of poverty in Ghana, defining the "poverty line" as per capita household income of less than US\$100. Also examined were the wider economic context and government policies and programmes, especially in the area of rural development, as a basis for explaining the rural poverty patterns observed.

During 1979/80 the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) of the University of Ghana launched what was meant to be a five-year project, entitled, "Poverty in Ghana: Its Scope, Extent and Impact on Development". Conceived as an interdisciplinary, comprehensive, and long-term research programme, the survey was expected to analyse the scope, extent, cause, and policy implications of poverty in Ghana, as part of the search for "alternative models of development" (ISSER, 1983: 4). Unfortunately, the project ran aground halfway and, in a sense, became significant more for what it could

not do than for what it did. By the date of the Mid-Project Report (May 1983), the analysis of most of the phase I data had not even begun. And, from all indications, the project ended there.

Apparently, the project stalled as a result of problems such as a cumbersome organization, poor funding (especially after the initial funds had been exhausted), inauspicious timing (it was interrupted at the onset of the December 1981 revolution and subsequently collided with the Economic Reform Programme, which had a very low priority for social policy issues), adverse interpersonal relations within the coordinating organization, stiff opposition to the project *ab initio* by some senior members of ISSER, and the sheer scope of the project itself. But perhaps the most significant feature of the project, methodologically, was its lack of conceptual rigour and theoretical focus. Perhaps this was also its most fundamental problem.

In Boateng et al. (1989), which came under the World Bank initiated/assisted poverty profile assessment project, in the context of the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) in the Sub-Saharan Africa Programme co-sponsored by the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank (ADB), an attempt was made to create a baseline and a structure for poverty research. Its target was policy-oriented analysis of poverty in Ghana, based on data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) being conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service.

The survey adopted what was called a "poverty focus" rather than an "inequality focus" (because it concerned itself only with the lower end of income distribution, not with distribution as a whole). Here, a baseline poverty profile for Ghana was suggested based on the first-year results of the GLSS and it was also recommended that "for operational purposes, real household expenditure (or income) per capita be used as the measure of individual welfare" (Boateng et al. 1989).

In Dei (1992), the author analysed "hardships and survival", especially the effects of the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) on the poor and the disadvantaged in society. The case study of a Ghanaian Community, Ayirebi, was based on data from two main sources:

- participant and non-participant observations of everyday life in the Ayirebi community;
- household surveys by means of interviews and questionnaires on demographic, ecological, and socio-demographic parameters, first in 1982 and again in 1989. In 1982/83, 412 households representing one-quarter of the community's

households were covered, the total population of the research sample being 1,543 persons. Of the 412 households in the initial survey, 407 were among the 405 households in the 1989 follow-up survey, which had a sample of 1,722 persons.

Dei's study is methodologically significant in many ways: it is longitudinal in concept (though this may not have been so *ab initio*); it attempts a holistic approach not normally feasible under statistical surveys; and it suggests the need for community-based monitoring research, especially for assessing the impact of the policy process or of particular policies or measures addressed to the poverty situation.

Finally, the Ghana Statistical Service (through the Government Statistician) addressed the University of Ghana (Research and Conferences Committee's) Seminar on "Poverty Profile from the GLSS". Again (as in Boateng et al. 1989) it was based on the results of the 1987-88 survey, since the data from the other two surveys already conducted are yet to be processed.

Concerning the data situation, it is true that practically all past studies of poverty in Ghana, except Boateng et al. (1989), Ghana Statistical Service (1994), and the empirical community-based survey by Brown, were based on incomplete and out-of-date data. For example, even the UNICEF estimate of the Physical Quality of Life Index for the various regions of Ghana, produced in 1984, had to use 1970 data! But the situation seems to have started to improve.

For example, under the GLSS, Ghana has commenced a five-year survey programme under the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), with the active support and advice of the United Nations Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the SDA project of the World Bank/UNDP/ADB. The GLSS started in September 1987 and, as the GSS informed the "Poverty in Ghana" seminar at Legon in 1994, three rounds of the survey have been conducted since take-off: 1987/88, 1988/89, and 1990/91.

Ghana's GLSS collects information at the level of the community, the household and the individual and on a wide range of variables, e.g. health, migration, income, expenditure, savings, remittances, anthropometric measurements for both children and adults, etc. It is also generating data that will make it possible to analyse sources of income and consumption patterns by poverty groups as well as basic needs achievement by poverty groups, especially in the domains of health and education.

The GLSS sample consists of 3,200 households across approximately 200 Enumeration Areas (EAs) stratified by urban/rural

and ecological zones; a household being defined as a "group of individuals who live and eat together for a period of at least nine months of the year preceding the interview", a standard World Bank definition.

Admittedly, the GLSS is primarily a policy-oriented data system. Its purpose is to monitor the experiences of all sectors of the population during the process of economic reform, and to develop a tool for policy and intervention to alleviate the hardships of the vulnerable groups. However, given its national coverage, its rigorous sampling procedures, and the wide range of relevant economic, demographic, social, and living conditions data that it collects, the GLSS also provides a potentially rich source of good-quality data for systematic poverty research. In this regard, it promises to be a significant improvement over the older National Household Budget Survey of the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Concepts, theoretical orientations, and major findings

None of the pre-1989 Ghanaian surveys reviewed here can be said to have addressed the problem of the definition of "poverty" critically or in a rigorous manner. Neither has any of them made explicit a theoretical framework or even seemed to have worked consciously under any particular theoretical framework. Rather, the "poverty line/absolute poverty" concept seems to have been adopted by the surveys, at least implicitly, though they did differ in their specific operationalization of the concept. However, in Brown (1979) "poverty" was defined, again implicitly, in terms of relative exclusion from the so-called "five basic elements of social consumption" and from the exercise of political power, rather than in terms of any monetary measure or poverty line.

Boateng et al. (1989) and the Ghana Statistical Service (1994) both addressed the issue of definition. The former recommends that, "for operational purposes", real household expenditure (or income) per capita be used as the measure of individual welfare. As to where a poverty line should be drawn, it takes the basic position that "the nature and meaning of poverty are country and culture specific" (Boateng et al. 1989: 5) and, where a poverty line does not already exist in a given country, it suggests the following "two conceivable operational procedures":

- (i) Given a distribution of individuals by real household expenditure per capita, choose a poverty line which cuts off a certain fraction, say the bottom 30 per cent of individuals. In addition, choose a "hard core" poverty line which cuts off a smaller fraction, say the bottom 10 per cent, of individuals in some base period. These become the

poverty lines with which to evaluate changes in poverty over time and differences across regions at a point in time.

(ii) . . . use a given fraction of mean expenditure per capita as the poverty line.

The Ghana Statistical Service's operationalization of the poverty line differs in some detail from that of Boateng et al. Instead of using the mean expenditure per capita as its basis, it uses the Mean Welfare Index, a measure that incorporates not only expenditure but also actual self-provision; i.e. the portion of household production consumed by the household. Thus, the Mean Welfare Index for 1987/88 was estimated at 296,400 Cedis and for 1990/91 at 309,200 Cedis. Also, although regarding two-thirds of the mean as the cut-off point for defining secondary/relative poverty, as in the Boateng et al. analysis, it takes 50 per cent (and not 33 per cent) of the mean as the cut-off point for defining primary or "hard core" poverty.

Brown's presentation (1979) is perhaps the closest in this review to any clear theoretical orientation, i.e. the author's structural perspective on the causation of poverty in Ghana – a perspective that sees poverty as a manifestation of "social marginalisation and as a necessary consequence (and concomitant) of the stratification and polarisation of the Ghanaian society". Thus, a reversal of the trend is seen to lie only in a radical reorientation of national development policy and strategy, entailing, among others, "a change in the distribution of public services to the poorest sectors of the society", institutional reforms (e.g. land reform and public ownership of major industries), and "a basic restructuring of the political, economic and social balance of power within the country", as a condition for ensuring "far-reaching changes in the pattern of distribution of benefits".

Perhaps the most general finding of the studies reviewed is that, in Ghana (as elsewhere), poverty is a complex phenomenon in terms of both its nature and probable causation. But, of course, there were more specific findings reported regarding the incidence and pattern of poverty, especially of absolute poverty in the country. For example, the earlier studies all found that poverty was concentrated in rural areas, whether poverty was defined in monetary terms or in terms of access to basic amenities. Also reported by such studies was a north-south difference, with greater poverty in the north, as a reflection of uneven development.

The finding that poverty in Ghana is predominantly a rural phenomenon has also been confirmed by more recent surveys,

including Boateng et al. (1989) and Ghana Statistical Service (1994).

Six basic factors have been identified to explain the worse position of rural areas: a slow rate of economic growth, high rates of rural population growth; the exclusion of the rural poor from the processes and/or benefits of economic growth; an inequitable distribution of income, especially along the rural-urban dimension; the inability of the rural poor to influence the course of public policy, and external factors that precipitate and/or exacerbate Ghana's economic crisis.

Other countries

As stated above, the other countries in Anglophone West Africa (representing only about 6 per cent of the population of the sub-region) could not be covered in depth. But it is also true that each of them presents a somewhat difficult research environment in terms of the political situation prevailing right now. Yet, from the scanty evidence available, poverty is probably a very serious problem in each of them, particularly for The Gambia and for Sierra Leone.

Even though all five countries concerned fall into the "Low Human Development" category in terms of the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) as at 1992, the rankings for Liberia, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone are 131, 154, and 159, respectively, which makes the Gambia the seventh least developed nation in the world.

The only available study, an ILO survey (ILO 1982a), assessed the incidence of poverty in Sierra Leone. Using a poverty line based on the costing of a basic needs food basket, topped up to take account of non-food needs (especially housing, fuel, furniture, and transport), the survey found the pattern summarized in Table 12.2.

The Population and Housing Census conducted by the Central Statistics Department of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Industrial Development of The Gambia in 1983 devotes its volume II (Republic of The Gambia 1989) to housing and household characteristics. A copy of that particular volume was not available to us but it probably contains information with which some poverty research on The Gambia could start off.

In view of the fact that the problem of poverty is probably serious in these countries and that the patterns of poverty and inequality prevailing in them may prove unique in some ways, there is an urgent need for systematic poverty research in each of them.

Table 12.2 Sierra Leone: Comparative data showing the proportion of urban and rural populations falling below poverty line

	Urban	Rural
Poverty line ^a (Le/month)	64.0	39.0
% population falling below	50	45
Food poverty line ^a (Le/month)	42.0	27.0
% population falling below	20	20
Target groups	Hawkers, casual labourers, unskilled workers	Subsistence upland rice farmers

Sources: ILO (1982a: Table 7).

Note:

^aIt is significant that the poverty line in each case was set higher for the urban than for the rural areas, which may tend to exaggerate urban poverty relative to rural poverty. The basic idea makes sense, because the cost of living tends to be higher in urban areas, especially if the difference in the poverty lines adopted exactly reflects the urban-rural differences in the cost of living.

Summary evaluation of poverty research in Anglophone West Africa

The three criteria in terms of which this evaluation is conducted are the quality of data used, theoretical orientation and policy relevance.

Most of the studies reviewed in this presentation were based on fragmentary and out-of-date secondary data. Official data sources, even when they were able to generate, analyse, and publish data of satisfactory quality, were often hamstrung by serious resource constraints. Furthermore, the inflexible emphasis on economic statistics has persisted in these countries, which means that demographic and social statistics have not received enough attention. Even in research institutes with social policy or development units, such units were invariably rated low when it came to funding. Even though the 1970s are sometimes referred to as the active period for the development of demographic and social statistics in Africa (for example in ECA's *A Strategy for the Implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s*, March 1992, esp. paras 62-70), there is little to show for the period in terms of data relevant to social policy analysis in general or poverty research in particular.

Worsening the data gap was the dearth of empirical social science and social policy studies, even in the universities and

research institutes, especially in studies not directly linked to income generation and economic growth. This situation arose not just because of weak financial support for social science generally, but also because of a distinct lack of financial support for social policy research in particular, both by governments and by the major international development agencies.

The 1980s saw the intensification of the process of economic globalization and, in most cases, drastic cutbacks in public expenditure. In that context, no attention could, understandably, be spared for such concerns as poverty research or poverty alleviation; at least not until even the promoters of unconditional liberalization began to see the immense social costs of their strategy. For example, the UNDP 1986 Roundtable on "Development: The Human Dimension" noted that "the human costs of the current process are unacceptable from a humanitarian perspective" and that they could not be accepted even "from an economic perspective" (UNDP 1986).

It is to be hoped that the various initiatives aimed at strengthening the survey capabilities of the countries, initiatives to which reference has already been made above, derive from a new appreciation of the importance of social statistics and of social policy analysis broadly conceived, even in the context of economic liberalism. It is also to be hoped that such initiatives will, in the medium term, ensure a much-improved data situation for social policy and poverty research in the sub-subregion.

With respect to theoretical orientation and contribution, as was noted concerning the studies in Ghana, poverty research in this sub-subregion has not been informed by any strong theoretical orientation as such, and there does not seem to have been any particular interest in developing or advancing the theory of poverty or in contributing to the comparative knowledge of poverty. Rather, the studies were, typically, policy oriented and, even though some of them were rigorous in their conceptualization and analysis, the implications of the surveys were directed towards policy and development action, not towards theoretical issues. This does not mean that policy-oriented research is inherently incapable of making important contributions to theory development; only that such potential can best be realized if policy-oriented research is consciously formulated and executed with theory development as part of the objective in view.

As for the policy relevance of these studies, there are two important dimensions, namely, their suitability for use in the policy process, and the extent to which they have actually been used.

In terms of these considerations, the bureaucracy has generally tended to find these studies not as suitable as it would have wished. In particular, the studies have often been dismissed by the bureaucracy as invariably selective, largely subjective, and not reflective of national priorities. Of course, although this assessment may, to some extent, reflect the true worth of these studies (use of partial and out-of-date data, generalization beyond analysis and data, conclusion and recommendations not necessarily implied in or supported by data/analysis, and so on), there is no doubt that it also reflects the prevailing anti-intellectualism of the policy class in particular and the ruling class in general.

The 1980s have, for the most part, seen social research at its lowest ebb in all the countries covered by this review. Some recent initiatives dating back to the UNDP 1986 Roundtable on Development, and now involving all the major international development institutions, especially UNDP, World Bank, ECA, and ADB, seem to have set in motion a process that could, in the medium term, lead to significant improvement in the data situation in these countries.

However, even a major improvement in the data situation or even in the survey capabilities of the countries concerned will not lead automatically or necessarily to a corresponding improvement in the level or quality of social research activity. More specifically, it will not lead to any improvement in the level or quality of poverty research activity, whether by government agencies or by researchers based in the universities and national research institutions. There are still difficult problems of funding, of accessibility of data for researchers, and of delays in the processing and publication of data. There is also the problem of how to sustain the improvements now being promoted.

The fundamental obstacles seem to be the low priority still accorded social policy, social statistics, and social research in these countries at the level of resource allocation; the prevailing anti-intellectualism among the policy class; and the low ranking that human social welfare concerns and issues have in the context of the current economic liberalization campaign.

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