

## Chapter 13

# South Africa: Poverty Under Duress

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Poverty is not knowing where your next meal is going to come from, and always wondering when the council is going to put your furniture out and always praying that your husband must not lose his job. To me that is poverty.

(Mrs. Witbooi,  
Philipstown, Karoo)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The biggest change in the poverty research that has taken place in South Africa over the past decade relates to the context within which it has occurred. Before 1990 few people even dreamed that the old pattern of political power, with whites in control of the legislature, the army, and the budget, would change in the foreseeable future.<sup>2</sup> But since February 1990 and the unbanning of the African Congress organizations, together with the release of political leaders, all research into poverty has occurred with the knowledge that any issues uncovered, or policy proposals made, would engage the immediate interest of the government of the country. In 1984 the Prime Minister (P. W. Botha) virulently attacked a major scientific conference on poverty in South Africa. (*Debates of Parliament*, 27 April 1984).<sup>3</sup> Ten years later, President Nelson Mandela is leading a government of national unity whose primary commitment, expressed through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), is to eliminate poverty (see *White Paper on the Reconstruction and Development Programme*, 1994).

In the context of South Africa it is clear to most people that poverty is a profoundly political issue. For this reason research workers there are aware of the degree to which the prevailing power structure shapes the whole research agenda in this field.

Thus, it is important to begin an assessment of poverty research in South Africa with explicit recognition of the political environment in which that research was or is being done. For the first three-quarters of the twentieth century South Africa was dominated both politically and economically by the white minority. Successive challenges to the ideology and practices of white racism were put down, often with brute force. Trade Unions were banned and, after 1960, the major African political organizations were banned and the leadership banned, imprisoned, or exiled.

However, looking back from the vantage point of 1995, it is possible to see that a sea-change began to take place in the balance of power between black and white during the 1970s. The re-emergence and rapid growth of the black trade unions, the rise of black consciousness, the Soweto uprising of 1976, were all both manifestations and causes of profound changes taking place within the society. Certainly by 1980, despite the harsh crackdown of the state, the certainties and seeming permanence of the Verwoerdian apartheid era were giving way to a recognition that South Africa had a future beyond apartheid. People were beginning to talk and think about a post-apartheid society. Those undertaking research in poverty during the 1980s were explicitly conscious that they were part of that broader historical process (Wilson and Ramphele 1989: ix).

Against this background it is perhaps helpful to recognize that poverty research in South Africa can be divided into four time zones: before 1980; the decade when the shift taking place in the balance of power became manifest, though few people expected the transfer of power; the extraordinary period between President De Klerk's speech in 1990, announcing the beginning of fundamental political change, and the inauguration of President Mandela in the wake of South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994; and the period of democratic government since then.

Turning briefly to the period before 1980, we recognize that research into poverty is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. An annotated bibliography by Wilfred Wentzel (1982) provides a useful guide to the literature. As early as 1906 a government commission was appointed in what was then the colony of the Transvaal to look into the matter of "indigency". The Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission 1906-1908 was fatally flawed in that its terms of reference limited it to consider only the indigency of whites, with very little explicit attention on black poverty, except insofar as it affected whites. Nevertheless it is a fascinating document, not only for the definition of indigency

(para. 7) and detailed factual information, but also for its insistence on the importance of a methodology that deals with general, social and economic causes, and aims at preventing the growth of indignity" (T.G. 13/08 para. 9, cited by Wentzel 1982: 20).

For the next two generations the most conspicuous poverty research undertaken in the country focused primarily on whites. Thus, for example, the famous Carnegie Commission into the Poor White Problem (*Arm Blanke Vraagstuk*) was set up in 1928 by a team of university and church people with help from a non-profit American philanthropic trust. The Commission published five major volumes in 1932/33 (Carnegie Commission 1932<sup>4</sup>), which, whilst breaking new ground in poverty research methodology, also set the scene for the development of a range of political strategies focusing exclusively on white poverty. It was precisely some of these strategies that were introduced or strengthened (or, as some would say, hijacked and misused<sup>5</sup>) by the National Party after it came to power in 1948. Thus one strand of South Africa's research history provides an immediate warning about the possible ambiguities inherent in action-orientated research that has too narrow a focus. For, with hindsight, it is possible to interpret the apartheid policies of the National Party as an anti-poverty programme – *for whites only*. It is this sorry history that should make all research workers duly humble and cause us to be vigilant against anti-poverty programmes that incorporate strategies that will benefit some poor people at the expense of others even poorer and more vulnerable.

But there is a second, more inclusive, strand of poverty research in South Africa. W. M. Macmillan published an important and influential book in 1930 which analysed both black and white poverty within the single South African political economy. This book, together with the Native Economic Commission (1932) plus the work of the South African Institute of Race Relations (see, for example, Jones and Hoernlé 1942), ensured that the issue of poverty as it affected black as well as white South Africans during the decades before apartheid remained in the national consciousness if not at the top of the political agenda. Details of further research into poverty during the three decades of high apartheid, after 1948, are contained in Wentzel's bibliography. A number of individual studies, often by those trained in anthropology or sociology rather than economics, provided important insights into living conditions, including poverty datum lines, in particular urban areas or job categories (e.g.

domestic workers). However, despite periodic calls for another Carnegie Inquiry to look at the full ramifications of poverty in South Africa, it was not until fifty years after the first one that this idea took root.

In January 1980, a feasibility study was commissioned. This began more than two years of preparatory work. This period included time spent assessing other research around the world. The rash of poverty studies during the 1970s in Britain, Ireland, the European Community, Australia, and the United States were compared and contrasted with numerous studies, often sponsored by the World Bank or the International Labour Organization, in Kenya, Sri Lanka, Brazil, India, and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

During the preliminary phase, when soundings were being taken, three important aspects of the inquiry became abundantly clear. First, any study of poverty could be truly meaningful only if there was real inside understanding and participation of those communities that had to endure poverty. In the South African context, where the vast majority of those who are poor are black, this meant that, as far as possible, the centre of gravity of the inquiry had to be black rather than white. Second, it became clear that the inquiry should be designed as an open-ended, ongoing process rather than as a once-off affair. Third, while the study gradually took shape in discussions around the country, a striking contrast in views became apparent. White South Africans were generally enthusiastic about the need for research to gather facts on poverty. Black South Africans were unimpressed by data-gathering. "Why spend money finding out what we already know?", they asked. "What we need is action against poverty." This view was crucial in guiding the subsequent work of the second Carnegie Inquiry during the ten years leading up to the publication and dissemination of its main report in 1989 (Wilson and Ramphela 1989).<sup>7</sup>

The next major thrust in poverty research came in 1992 with the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD). This involved a comprehensive survey of 9,000 households drawn from a carefully selected sample throughout the length and breadth of the country. The principal purpose of the survey was to collect hard statistical information about the conditions under which South Africans live in order to provide policy makers with the data required for planning strategies to implement such goals as those outlined in the Government of National Unity's Reconstruction and Development Programme. The idea for such a survey was first mooted by a delegation of

South Africans from the African National Congress and the Congress of South African Trade Unions when they met officials of the World Bank in Washington in April 1992. A South African research unit was asked to coordinate and manage the collection of data required, which was done in a fruitful interaction between South Africans responsible for the survey and staff and consultants of the Bank. From the beginning it was agreed that the data, once collected and cleaned, would be in the public domain and would not belong to any particular university, or government department, or to the World Bank. In this way, those involved in the survey hoped to encourage and consolidate an attitude in South Africa that sees public accessibility to all such data, from whatever source, as a fundamental attitude of a democratic society. It is in this spirit that computer disks and code books containing the data are also available to anybody who wishes to use them.<sup>8</sup> Before embarking on the actual survey, a comprehensive search of the available literature was undertaken in order to collate all information about living standards and development in South Africa in the decade since the main empirical work of the Carnegie Inquiry had been done. Altogether, thirteen such papers, each containing a relevant bibliography, were published in 1993 and 1994. Nine of the papers focus on different regions of the country, and four focus on cross-cutting themes of water, energy, nutrition, and housing.<sup>9</sup>

Building on this work there are two further research initiatives to be noted, both begun in the period since the Mandela Government of National Unity took office – one driven by the government's Central Statistical Service (CSS), the other led by the independent Data Research Africa (DRA) working in collaboration with the World Bank. The CSS, in October 1994, undertook a household survey throughout the country (including the TBVC areas<sup>10</sup>) and was able to release the first set of informative tables in March 1995 (CSS 1985). The DRA programme is aimed at clothing the bare bones of the statistics collected in recent years with a more qualitative assessment of the nature of poverty. Drawing also on some of the Carnegie studies in the early 1980s it aims to gain some insight into the way in which poverty may have changed, qualitatively, over the past decade. Lessons from these various research initiatives have and are being fed into the drafting of the questionnaire for the 1996 census, whose results it is hoped will take our knowledge of the South African political economy to a new level of comprehensiveness and accuracy.

## Concepts of poverty

The earliest definitions of poverty in the South African context focused, as explained above, on whites and they were highly subjective. At the time of the first Carnegie Commission in the early 1930s the definition was essentially based upon individual personal estimates of what constituted “a decent standard of living for white men [*sic*]” against varying traditional standards in different parts of South Africa (Carnegie Commission 1932: vii). But throughout the inter-war years, from 1918 on, regular government commission reports on the cost of living focused attention on the relationship between incomes and the costs of basic needs, including housing. In 1938 the South African Institute of Race Relations published a paper examining wages and the cost of living for black South Africans (Ballinger and Ballinger 1938). A major step forward in poverty studies was taken during the Second World War by the Professor of Sociology at the University of Cape Town, who published a number of papers calculating a local Poverty Datum Line, with explicit examination of its nutritional basis, and analysing the distribution of poverty among “Coloured” and “European” households in Cape Town. Following Batson’s pioneering work, the Poverty Datum Line, variously evolving into a Minimum Living Level and a Supplementary Living Level (University of South Africa), a Household Subsistence Level, and a Household Effective Level (University of Port Elizabeth), was refined and modified during the 1970s as black trade unions re-emerged as a force for change and guidelines were needed in the ongoing debate with management about minimum wages (Wilson and Ramphela 1989: 16–17).

The second Carnegie Inquiry made use of these definitions in the course of its work during the 1980s to calculate the proportion of households falling into poverty. However, its work began with a much broader concept of poverty being like illness – manifesting itself in different ways in different circumstances. Research workers were not provided with a nice clean definition of poverty that they could measure but were told instead to go out into the highways and byways of the country to meet people who endured poverty and those who lived or worked with them and to *listen* to what those people, from their own experience, understood poverty to mean. And then to describe and try to measure that. This, as the Carnegie report noted, “is an untidy process and was scathingly condemned by an economist of the

World Bank, at a seminar in Washington on the Inquiry, as one that produced mere 'anecdotal evidence'. . . . We do not wish to be misunderstood: statistical analysis is essential, and the effort to toughen up the soft social sciences by improving the quality of statistics is one of the most significant intellectual advances of our time. But precisely because the numbers are so important it is vital to pause at the beginning to consider what we are measuring and, perhaps even more significant, what we are not measuring" (Wilson and Ramphete, p. 15).

The process of delving deeper was marked, in the Carnegie Inquiry, by a constant interaction between empirical and theoretical insights. Thus the first six (out of more than 300) (see Wilson and Ramphete 1989: appendix 1 for details) conference papers reported not only on "major problems as perceived by the community" or on the perspectives of life as seen by migrant workers ("men without children"), but also on systematic consideration of the different dimensions, or levels, of poverty as well as problems of measurement in rich and poor countries. The next three papers focused on basic needs and on the link between income distribution and poverty in some of the poorest rural areas of the country. Thus the inquiry emerged with a concept of poverty that had many different characteristics or faces.

These "many faces of poverty" were isolated and then described with the aid of the specific detail emerging from the mass of empirical studies. Where possible, statistical estimates of the prevalence of these faces on the national level were calculated. They included hunger and sickness, malnutrition and tuberculosis; the absence of such basic needs as the ready availability of fuel for cooking and lighting, clean water for drinking, adequate shelter for households, sewerage facilities, jobs for those who wanted and needed them, reasonable and safe working conditions for those who had them, access to land for rural households without alternative sources of income. Other less tangible characteristics of poverty were also uncovered and considered, including the fundamental sense of uncertainty about "where your next meal is going to come from"; the humiliation felt by those without adequate housing at not being able to offer hospitality; the shame felt by fathers unable to feed their families because they could not find work; the sense of desperate inadequacy felt by mothers whose children were hungry; the vulnerability of those "on the edge of survival", for whom a sudden shift in circumstances such as drought, a rise in food prices, or loss of job can plunge them into destitution. (See Wilson and Ramphete 1989: Chapter 9).<sup>11</sup>

## Hypotheses

The first hypothesis, or perhaps it is really the first assumption, in South African poverty research relates to the value of the research work itself. How do those undertaking such research respond to the question posed by those enduring (or close to those enduring) poverty: "Why spend money to find out what we already know?". The answer is that, it is necessary for two reasons. First, facts are themselves politically powerful. The particularity of what it means to be poor, combined with accurate information about the extent of that poverty, raises consciousness in society in such a manner as can generate or strengthen action to try and deal with the problem. The second reason arises from the fact that the planning of any strategy against poverty is facilitated by the existence of a detailed map of the terrain. To know that 50 per cent of households are living below the current minimum living level is interesting and important, but not very helpful as a guideline for developing appropriate action. But to find out that, in a country whose capacity to generate electricity is greater than the amount currently being consumed, the proportions of black and white households without access to such energy are 63 per cent and 0.2 per cent, respectively, confronts one with a reality about which one can begin to think very creatively. Thus in South Africa the concept of poverty research has been expanded into a three-stage process: facts; causes; strategies. It is no longer acceptable (if it ever was) to conceive of poverty research as being confined to collecting data, or even analysing causes. Research is all focused on finding ways of preventing and curing the syndrome. But, in order to do this, the facts of the matter and the analysis of causes are vital.

The second hypothesis is that history is important. Nowhere is this more true than in South Africa, where the burden of history weighs heavily upon the present. To put it another way, the removal of racist laws and practices from the body politic is no more likely to change the distribution of wealth in the country than is the removal of scaffolding likely to change the shape of a building constructed with its help. Thus abolition of the Land Act, which in effect prevented black farmers from owning and farming all except a small fraction of the country, will not, by itself, ensure a more equitable distribution of land between black and white in the country. To understand the differences in entitlements between white and black, rich and poor, old and young, men and women, urban and rural in South Africa today, it helps a great deal to understand something of the dynamics of



the history, particularly with regard to the consequences of conquest, of the migrant labour system developed in the diamond and gold mines, of the differential state expenditure on black and white education over the past century, and of the ever more stringent anti-black urbanization policies of the apartheid government, to name only four hugely powerful influences.<sup>12</sup>

The third hypothesis, closely associated with the previous one, relates to the relevance of political power in any economic analysis of the phenomenon. Poverty is a profoundly political issue. This can be seen most clearly perhaps in a close-up analysis of the conditions that gave rise to the establishment, over a hundred years ago, of the single-sex compounds that are the basis of the notorious migrant labour system and that still, in 1995, housed over 95 per cent of the black workers in the gold mines.<sup>13</sup> The then existing pattern of distribution of political power in the society is central to understanding the shape of the labour system that emerged in the aftermath of the mineral discoveries (see, for example, Turrell 1987).

Another hypothesis that underpinned poverty research during the 1980s lay in the tension between macro and micro perspectives. Implicit rather than explicit, this hypothesis was based on the premise that, to understand the *nature* of poverty and its impact on human beings, to describe it best, one needs micro analysis. But, to understand the *causes* of poverty the emphasis must shift to both a deeper historical as well as a wider macro-economic perspective.

Finally, in terms of hypotheses, the report of the second Carnegie Inquiry concluded that, just as it was inadequate to reduce so complex a phenomenon as poverty to a single number or characteristic, so was it hopelessly oversimplifying to focus on a single cause of whatever kind, even so pervasive a one as "apartheid". Rather it was necessary to tease out the significance of various strands in a network of interacting causes. This led, in the three-stage process of facts, causes, and strategies, to explicit recognition that any plan of action against poverty must itself include a whole array of strategies at different levels.

## Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that emerged from these hypotheses during the 1980s laid far less emphasis on the personal characteristics of causation compared, for example, with the first Carnegie Commission fifty years previously. There a whole volume of the report was devoted to answering the question, "To what extent have psychological factors played a causal part" in creating the

poor white problem? In the second Carnegie Inquiry, researchers were far more concerned to identify structural and other causes beyond the control of individuals enduring poverty than in any form of victim blaming. Although there was explicit recognition of the relevance of the rate of population growth in any consideration of the causes of poverty, as well as the impact of despair and failure to believe in themselves and in crippling the initiative and energy of those enduring poverty, nevertheless the emphasis lay primarily on structural (i.e. historical-political) and on economic (e.g. lack of investment, inadequate growth) causes.

It is perhaps a little too early to pinpoint exactly the change in emphasis of the theoretical framework used in writing about poverty as South Africa moved from the 1980s to the 1990s. However, if one contrasts the Carnegie report (1989), written by South Africans, with the World Bank discussion papers (1994), written largely by well-informed outside observers (see, particularly, Fallon and Perreira da Silva (1994)). There is a clear shift from historical and institutional causes to current economic causes. This change should not be overemphasized. The World Bank writers are mindful of historical causes such as those highlighted in the Carnegie Inquiry, but they build on this to consider many more economic aspects (such as tariff policy or investment strategies) than were looked at in detail, or even considered at all, in the 1980s. But neither in the 1980s nor in the 1990s are those writing about poverty focusing much on individual psychological considerations that, at other times and in other places, have occupied so much attention.

## Data sources

Like the curate's egg, South African statistics are good in parts – but extremely patchy. Censuses in 1904, 1911, 1921, 1936, 1946, 1951, 1970, 1980, 1985, and 1991 combined with a whole set of industrial, agricultural, and other censuses, together with careful statistical records from individual sectors such as the mining industry, enable the researcher to uncover many aspects of the South African political economy over an unusually long-time period.<sup>14</sup> However, the data are also full of holes, which make sustained analysis difficult. For example, the declaration by South Africa's apartheid government of political independence for the Transkei in 1976 was accompanied by the removal of any reference to people living in Transkei from the national statistics. Similarly for Bophutatswana, Venda, and Ciskei. The fact that in

economic and demographic terms these areas were impoverished rural reserves where the vast majority of the people were unskilled, had little education, and were black meant that their exclusion from the national data sets biased the results in such a way as to understate, to a considerable extent, such characteristics as the degree of poverty, the level of unemployment, or the prevalence of illness such as tuberculosis. By 1993, for example, the total population of the TBVC areas was estimated to be 7.6 million, i.e. 19 per cent of the total of 40.1 million.

The second Carnegie Inquiry, which published a good deal of information about poverty during the 1980s, did not confine itself in this manner. Indeed, a number of papers attempted to examine issues of poverty within these four TBVC areas as well as in the rest of South Africa.<sup>15</sup> But the weakness of the Carnegie Inquiry was that it did not itself generate any new overall statistical data. What it did was to initiate a whole set of individual micro studies in both urban and rural areas as well as to stimulate a number of statistical studies that were themselves based on existing official data and thus subject to the limitations inherent in those data.

It was in an attempt to overcome the weaknesses in the national data sets as collected by the apartheid government that the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development was conceived in 1992 (see above, page 230). Most of the fieldwork was carried out and the data collected in the last five months of 1993. The first selection of tables was published in August 1994 (PSLSD 1994).

## Major results

Perhaps the best way to convey the results of the latest statistical research is to lay out, as succinctly as possible, some of the salient facts emerging from the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development, confirmed where relevant by findings from the CSS October 1994 Household Survey, and backed up by some of the insights from the earlier Carnegie Inquiry. The corrections, connections, and conclusions flowing from analysis of the new wave of statistical information have yet to be published. But it is likely that a number of articles, drawing from this material, will be published soon after this volume appears.<sup>16</sup>

If inequality is not taken into account it is possible to classify South Africa, in terms of average GNP per capita, as an upper-middle-income country, where it is so placed in the tables of the annual *World Development Report*. However, according to a

survey based on fifty-seven countries for which data were available in 1978, South Africa then had the highest measured Gini coefficient (= 0.66) in the world (see Wilson and Ramphela 1989: 18, for details). Calculation of the coefficient, based on the 1991 census data (thus excluding the TBVC areas), produced a similar result, with a Gini of 0.68 (McGrath and Whiteford 1994). Later work by the World Bank<sup>17</sup> on the SALSS data, as finally cleaned by 1995, suggests a 1993 Gini coefficient for the country as a whole of 0.61. Further confirmation of the size of the gap between rich and poor can be seen in the fact that in 1993 the richest 10 per cent of households had an average monthly income one hundred times greater than the average monthly income of the poorest 10 per cent of households: R9,938 v R97 (PSLSD 1994: Table 13.6). Using an exchange rate of R3.5 to the dollar, the average household income of the poorest 10 per cent is approximately \$1 per day. The vast majority of those who are this poor are African, and their average household size is 4.8 persons; thus the average income of those who are in the poorest 10 per cent of households works out at approximately 19 cents per person per day. Hardly what one would expect in a country that, in average terms, falls into the upper-middle-income range on the world scale.

Another way of measuring the depth of the inequality is simply to note that the poorest 40 per cent of individuals (where individuals are assumed to earn the household per capita income) earn 6 per cent of total income, whereas the richest 10 per cent earn almost half (47 per cent) and the richest 20 per cent earn more than two-thirds (69 per cent) of total income (Whiteford and McGrath 1994).

South Africa, as we have seen above, has long been part of the international attempt to construct poverty datum lines. Whiteford and McGrath (1994) construct seven different poverty lines for African households only. The World Bank, pending the emergence of further consensus, uses a relative poverty line of the poorest 40% of households, equivalent to approximately 53% of the total population, as measured by the 1993 South Africa Living Standards Survey.<sup>18</sup>

For the rural poor in South Africa, as in other parts of the world, access to arable land and landlessness are critical. What is peculiar about South Africa is: the extent to which the distribution of land is racially based; the speed with which population has been growing in precisely the areas that can least afford greater density on the land; the fact that this growth is quite different from the pattern on large-scale commercial farms where population has been decreasing and farms getting bigger.

Analysis of the 1993 data has not yet been done, but from the Carnegie Inquiry we know that the population density in the rural parts of the reserves is almost ten times the density on the largely white-owned commercial farms – 57 and 6 persons, respectively, per km<sup>2</sup>.

In 1954 a government commission (Tomlinson) calculated that the reserves could support approximately 60 per cent of the population counted there in the 1951 census if small-scale agriculture were to be properly developed there. But the remaining 40 per cent would have to move off the land. Instead of this decrease, we find that between 1960 and 1980 the population of the reserves rose from 4.5 million to 11 million. In 1951, approximately one-third of the black population lived in the reserves, one-third on the white-owned commercial farms; and one-third in towns. But, over the next thirty years, whilst people were pushed off commercial farms by mechanization and other changing techniques of production, combined with pressures of apartheid policy, they were prevented by the pass laws of that same policy from going to town. The only place to go was to the overcrowded reserves, where population rose astronomically. In the Ciskei during the twelve years (1970–1982) before “independence”, the population doubled. This represented a population growth rate of 5.9 per cent compared with the then natural rate of 3.3 per cent. Similarly in Qwa Qwa, a remote area without an urban economic base, population grew by at least 21 per cent per annum, and possibly even two or three times as fast as that. The consequences of these astronomical increases in rural population throughout the reserves are (a) to reduce the amount of land of those who have, and (b) to increase the number of those who have not. Thus in the Chata Valley, near Keiskammahoek in the Ciskei, between 1946 and 1981 the average size of land holding fell by 75 per cent from 1.72 ha to 0.43 ha, and the proportion of households without land increased from 10 per cent to 43 per cent.

It is not only land, however, that is in short supply for the poor. Also inadequate is access to basic needs such as energy, water, and shelter. The Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development has collected a mass of data that provide a much clearer picture than previously of availability by geographic area and race, thus facilitating better targeting by policy makers.<sup>19</sup> With regard to electricity, for example, we find that, whereas 100 per cent of white and Indian and 86 per cent of coloured households have access to electricity, only one-third (37 per cent) of African households enjoy the same amenity. The geographic dimension of poverty in the country can be seen by

considering the availability of electricity to African households in two provinces: the largely urban PWV and the predominantly rural Eastern Cape. In the former, 71 per cent of households can get electricity from the national grid, whereas in the latter the figure is only 9 per cent. Again considering African families only, we find that the main sources of energy for cooking are: wood 35 per cent, paraffin 29 per cent, and electricity 26 per cent. But for whites, no fewer than 97 per cent use electricity for cooking. For lighting in African homes, candles are the primary source, used by 40 per cent, followed by electricity (34 per cent) and paraffin lamps (25 per cent). With regard to the time taken to collect wood, of those African families that have to collect wood, although 14 per cent take less than 30 minutes, 37 per cent take up to 2 hours, 33 per cent take 2–4 hours, and 16 per cent (one in six) take 4 hours or more. (PSLSD 1994: Table 4.9 ff.)

With regard to clean drinking water, a similar picture of racial and geographic differentials applies. Piped water into the house is enjoyed by virtually all white and Indian households and by 79 per cent of coloured. But for Africans only 18 per cent of households (less than one in five) households have internal water on tap. If we expand our definition of water availability to include households with taps in their yards then virtually all coloured households also have water, whereas African households with water remain in a minority at 44 per cent. Urban–rural differences are no less striking, with inside taps available to less than one in ten (8 per cent) of rural African households compared with two in five (40 per cent) in metropolitan areas.

These statistics confirm and consolidate the insights gleaned ten years previously from the micro studies of the Carnegie Inquiry, where time and again research workers reported something of the daily burden borne by individuals, mainly women in rural areas, in collecting water for their families. One study reported women in three different villages spending an average of 187 minutes per household every day collecting water. Another study of nineteen villages measured the physical energy expended and concluded that carrying the heavy (21 kg) plastic containers to the homestead required the energy equivalent of that needed by a miner wielding a pick. A third described in some detail the problems facing a community, many of whose members were afflicted by a strange, painful type of progressive arthritis (Mseleni joint disease), who had to travel for more than an hour to collect water from the largest freshwater lake in South Africa, which could easily have been connected to the village by some relatively inexpensive plastic pipes. Another study reported an average of one water tap available for every 760

people. Perhaps the most striking statistic of all was that for many poor people, in different rural parts of the country, the actual cash payment per litre of water was up to sixty-seven times greater than it was for urban middle-class households to run water out of their kitchen taps. Poverty, concluded the Carnegie Inquiry in more than one context, can be expensive (Wilson and Ramphele 1989: 48–51).

This focus on water helps to illuminate the value of having both the representative statistical sample as well as the detail of the in-depth case study, as discussed above (page 233). In the case of water, the work that has been done from the universities and other research centres has been incorporated into one of the first of the new South African government's White Papers, which sets out a strategic plan to provide clean drinking water for all (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 1994).

Listening to those who themselves endure poverty it is clear that one of the most painful aspects is unemployment. "Now I am not working," cried one man, "it is just like these hands of mine have been cut off and I am useless" (Thabane and Guy 1984). In story after story during the course of the Carnegie Inquiry, women and men talked of the pain of being unable to find work. Table 13.1, drawn from the 1993 survey, provides the bare bones of the picture.

From this table one can see something of the profile of poverty in South Africa. Differences in the levels of unemployment are marked between racial categories, between men and women, between urban and rural areas, and between different age groups.

Table 13.1 Unemployment in South Africa

	All	Male	Female	Rural	Urban	Metro- politan	Age 16–24	Age 55–64
African	39	34	44	42	35	34	65	20
Coloured	21	17	25	10	26	19	41	9
Indian	11	8	17	—	10	12	24	5
White	5	4	6	4	4	5	11	2
Total	30	26	35	40	26	22	53	15
CSS <sup>a</sup>	33	26	41	40	28			

Source: PSLSD (1994: 141 ff)

<sup>a</sup>For comparative purposes we include the CSS data for unemployment, similarly defined but including also 15 year olds wanting work, almost exactly one year later in October 1994.

Note: These figures include those who want work but who were too discouraged to continue looking for it.

## Current research and lacunae

A good deal of analytical research, using the 1991 census, the October 1994 Household Survey, and the data collected by the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development, is currently being done (see note 16), but there are five or six areas where a good deal of empirical work needs to be undertaken.

First, although the PSLSD survey covered a national sample from all over the country, the fact is that, for a number of reasons including difficulty of access, the situation on white-owned farms was not properly investigated. This is not surprising because these areas have been notoriously difficult to get into. There is a good deal more information available now than previously but, despite agricultural censuses, it remains true that a fully comprehensive sample survey of living standards (including production by black households living on these farms) remains to be done. Our information on conditions in rural areas outside the old homelands or reserves is still not good enough.

Second, agricultural output in the reserves is known to be relatively insignificant, as was confirmed by the 1993 survey. But for those exploring strategies of wealth creation by poor people living in and near this small-scale agriculture, there is still not enough detailed information available. It would be useful to know not only the actual but also the desired levels of production by households, especially in the rural areas.<sup>20</sup>

Third, sampling for the 1993 survey was done before the boundaries of the nine new provinces were done. Thus, the results of the situation in each province are not always as significant as they should be. The October 1994 Household Survey has gone a long way to remedying this deficiency at the provincial level, but there is still a need for surveys down at the magisterial and even more localized levels in order to pinpoint more accurately those communities most in need of infrastructural and other investment.

Fourth, proper and more comprehensive monitoring of current development projects, such as the Small Enterprise Foundation in Tzaneen, Northern Transvaal, is needed in order to learn from experience what works in terms of achieving its goals, and what does not, and why. There is not even a readily available list of the wide range of current initiatives, much less adequate ongoing analysis of their work, year by year.

Fifth, research is also required to explore the impact of changes at the macro level on the lives of those enduring poverty down at the grass roots. South Africa has so far done almost none



of the sort of research, pioneered by UNICEF amongst others, that examines the impact of various forms of structural adjustment on the nutritional status of children. In South Africa, for example, there has been little investigation of the impact on children in poor households of such macroeconomic measures as the removal in recent years of the subsidy on bread or of cuts in social spending. But this, like other gaps mentioned above, requires more refined and more regular statistical surveys to make possible longitudinal monitoring of the impact of different policy changes on poverty.

There is one final gap that needs to be considered. This relates to poverty that has long been linked to South Africa but that is endured by people living outside its political boundaries, in the limitrophe countries. Analysis during the course of the second Carnegie Inquiry showed that any study of poverty should be made with a clear recognition of the wider regional context in which it occurs.

Southern Africa is a region in which a century of industrial revolution centred on the gold-mining industry and based on a system of oscillating labour migration has forged a single economy whose boundaries are far wider than those of the political nation-state in which the gold mines are located.

In the light of the region's economic history, it is clear that any attempt to localise poverty by focussing on one small area (for example the Ciskei) in isolation from the wider economy would be profoundly misleading. Even more seriously, too narrow a geographic focus could easily result in strategies being developed to reduce poverty in one area (such as the Transkei) but which did so primarily at the expense of poor people somewhere else (such as in Lesotho or Mozambique). (Wilson and Ramphela 1989: 27-28).

A too narrow economic nationalism could develop a set of policies profoundly damaging to poor people living in countries surrounding South Africa. Table 13.2, which provides basic data for the eleven countries of southern Africa, helps to add some perspective to South Africa's position, with roughly one-third of the region's population generating three-quarters of its total wealth.

In terms of GNP per capita, Mozambique in the 1990s is by far the poorest country in the world. Yet for the full century of South Africa's industrial revolution Mozambique has contributed a significant proportion of the labour that has made that industrial transformation possible. More work needs to be done to understand more fully the process by which Mozambique has become poorer while South Africa has grown richer. One fundamental lesson from southern Africa is that it is not sufficient to focus on

Table 13.2 Southern Africa: basic indicators, 1992

Country	Area ('000 km <sup>2</sup> )	Population (million)	GNP/capita US\$
Angola	1,247	9.7	676-2,695 <sup>a</sup>
Botswana	582	1.4	2,790
Lesotho	30	1.9	590
Malawi	118	9.1	210
Mozambique	802	16.5	60
Swaziland	17	0.9	1,090
Tanzania	945	25.9	110
Zambia	753	8.3	-
Zimbabwe	391	10.4	570
Namibia	824	1.5	1,610
South Africa	1,221	39.8	2,670

Source: *World Development Report, 1994*.

<sup>a</sup>Estimated as lower-middle income.

poverty within the political boundaries of a particular nation state without considering in some detail, and in historic perspective, the nature and impact of economic linkages between that economy and other countries. Although not included in the scope of this paper, a good deal of poverty research has been done in the former frontline states. The most famous of these studies is undoubtedly the 1974/75 Rural Income Distribution Survey in Botswana, undertaken by the Central Statistics Office in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning of the government of Botswana. Twenty years later it remains a model of its kind.

#### NOTES

1. Cited by Morifi (1984).
2. For discussion on this point, as it was understood in 1989, see Wilson and Ramphela (1989: 6-8 & 258-260).
3. See *South African Outlook*, June 1984, for text of the Prime Minister's statement and the University's reply.
4. The five parts are: 1. Economic; 2. Psychological; 3. Educational; 4. Health; 5. Sociological
5. Those actually involved in the work of the Carnegie Commission clearly saw it as important as part of the process of removing political obstacles to black economic advancement (See Butterfield (1929). The problem arose with the uses to which the findings of the report, focusing exclusively on white poverty, were put by Professor Verwoerd and others.
6. This and the subsequent paragraph are drawn from the Preface to Wilson and Ramphela (1989), which contains further details on how the inquiry was organized.

7. Bibliographical details of the papers produced during the course of the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa are contained in Wilson and Ramphela (1989: appendix 1).
8. This material, from what is now known as the South Africa Living Standards Survey (SALSS), may be obtained, for a nominal fee (currently R250), from SALDRU, School of Economics, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa. Fax: 021-6504053 or e-mail: adams@socsci.uct.ac.za.
9. Bibliographical details of the thirteen volumes are contained in PSLSD, *South Africans Rich and Poor: Baseline Household Statistics* (1994), p. 344.
10. See the discussion on pp. 236–237 about data sources and the omission of Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda and Ciskei from government statistics over the eighteen years (for the Transkei) before 1994.
11. The report made use of the distinction made by John Iliffe (1987) between poor and very poor or destitute; between *pauvre* and *indigent*.
12. Two chapters (10 and 11) in Wilson and Ramphela (1989) are aimed at uncovering the roots of the existing pattern of poverty.
13. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Safety and Health in the Mining Industry, RP/1995, draws specific attention to the prevalence of the migrant labour system and its harmful consequences. See also Public Information Centre, (1995).
14. For those wishing to go directly to these data, a good place to begin is with Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Union Statistics for Fifty Years, 1910–1960* (1960). Subsequent annual volumes (starting in 1964) from the same source (variously renamed the Department of Census and Statistics and currently Central Statistical Services) maintain the flow.
15. Sets of these Carnegie papers are lodged not only in South African libraries but also in other parts of the world, including the Oxford Institute for Economics and Statistics and the Africa Collection of the Yale University Library.
16. Those wishing to be kept up to date regarding work in progress on the PSLSD data may do so via e-mail to adams@socsci.uct.ac.za. One significant early benefit of the policy to place all data immediately into the public domain has been the discovery, particularly by Pieter le Roux in his preliminary analysis of pensions, of the need for further cleaning of the data, especially with regard to assumptions about the frequency of pension payments and also about the imputed value of housing owned by households.
17. Ministry in the Office of the President: Reconstruction & Development Programme, *Key Indicators of Poverty in South Africa*; An analysis prepared for the office of the RDP by the World Bank, based on the South Africa Living Standards Survey, co-ordinated by the Southern Africa Labour & Development Research Unit at the University of Cape Town (forthcoming, 1995).

18. Ibid.
19. This picture has been further clarified by the October 1994 Household Survey of the Central Statistical Service published as this overview was being revised for publication. Unless otherwise stated, the data in this section are taken from the earlier PSLSD tables.
20. I am indebted to David Sanders for this point, as well as for discussion clarifying what research is needed to monitor aspects of structural adjustment.

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