

sity of the assault will depend on the quality and resolve of the people elected. The Government's determination to press ahead with the tricameral system will give the new parliamentarians a clout which, to judge by the percentage polls, they do not really merit. Many people believe, however, that the real quality has remained outside of the new system, and that the activities of the houses of Delegates and Representatives will quickly degenerate to jockeying for power and squabbles about 'own affairs'.

But what if the new constitution fails, if it is destroyed from without by the boycott politicians, or from within either by an excess of pressure or a lack of it? Some say that this will lead to the calling of a national convention; others that it would spell the end of National Party rule and the coming to power of the extreme right; and yet others that the result could well be a military take-over.

The future of Natal/KwaZulu, and of the country of which it forms a part, is a sombre vista full of impasses, of con-

fusion and potential conflict, at the end of which is the shadow either of full-scale confrontation or some form of co-operation. The shadow is too far away to identify.

Whatever the shadow turns out to be, apartheid and the White domination it has so successfully supported will be swept away. On a purely regional level, it is safe to say that if this province does not attempt to take some form of initiative now (now that the whole question of second tier government is in the melting pot), if it does not come to some definite idea of what its future should be and an equally definite idea of how to achieve such a future, the power to decide its own fate, never considerable since Union in 1910, will disappear altogether.

Our future will be shaped, not in Pietermaritzburg, or in Durban, or in Ulundi, but in some remote corridors of power, corridors which have in the past all too clearly demonstrated an insensitivity to the complexities of this unique region. □

by JILL NATTRASS

RURAL POVERTY IN KWAZULU

South Africa boasts that in general she is not only able to feed herself but is also a member of that elite band of nations who are able to export food to those countries whose agriculture cannot support their people. Yet despite this proud (and true) claim, poverty continues to stalk almost unchecked in South Africa's countryside.

White farms prosper, white farmers enjoy exceptionally high standards of living. Black farming families cannot grow sufficient to support themselves and, if they are to survive, must send their menfolk to seek work in the towns.

Why is this so? Why also is it that in the face of exceptional economic progress in one of the best endowed countries in the world this has remained so?

Although the rate of economic development in South Africa during the twentieth century has been high and, indeed, the yearly growth rate of the money value of Gross Domestic Product over the past fifty-year period averaged 8 percent, the spatial and racial aspects of this change in economic activity was extremely uneven. And

further, the spatial patterns of development bore little relationship to the historical patterns of population distribution.

In most economies, such an imbalance in economic resources would have been largely corrected by massive levels of labour migration. In South Africa, however, the initial gulf that existed between the population cultures retarded migration in the early stages of industrialisation. As the culture gap narrowed, so it was replaced by increasing levels of State controls over black population movements. These legal controls, coupled with the spatially uneven development patterns, have had the effect of chaining large numbers of people, almost all of whom are Africans, to the wheel of rural poverty.

KWAZULU

KwaZulu is one of the victims of this history. In 1980 the value of goods and services produced within KwaZulu per head of the population resident there was R124, whereas that for South Africa as a whole (including the TBVC countries) was R1 950.

A large proportion of KwaZulu's citizens work in South Africa either as migrant labourers or as 'frontier commuters' and consequently average income levels per head in KwaZulu are very much higher than would be the case if she was forced to be entirely self-sufficient. In 1980 the annual income of an average KwaZulu inhabitant was R543, whereas that of the average South African was R1 900.

More worrying, however, than the gap between average living levels in South Africa as a whole and the average for KwaZulu, is the growing gap emerging within KwaZulu itself, between the average lifestyles of those living in the towns and those still in the rural areas. In 1980 half of the people living in the towns earned more than R1 600 a year, not a great sum when compared with white earnings but considerably more than could be earned by those living in the rural areas, where half earned less than R700 a year — and 45 percent less than R300 a year.¹

At the top end of the income scale, there were also differences. Amongst the town dwellers 10 percent earned over R6 000, whereas in the rural areas only 1 percent of the earners fell into this category, most of whom will have been government employees.

More recent surveys undertaken by the Development Studies Unit of the University of Natal confirm these statistics. In the Nkandla district beyond Eshowe, a beautiful district of rolling hills, where all the families have access to land, there is plenty of firewood and in which even in the terrible drought of 1983 the streams continued to flow, the average yearly income from all sources (including that from growing crops for home consumption) in 1982 was R144 per person.²

Of this R144 per person, R100 was in the form of cash income, whilst the remainder was earned from local crop production and animal husbandry. The major source of cash income was remittances sent back into the area by the absent migrant workers. This source accounted for 46 percent of the total. Welfare payments from the KwaZulu Government in the form of old age pensions and disability grants accounted for a further 29 percent of the cash income, whilst the balance came from the earnings from casual labour and small business activities.

FEW JOBS

In the black rural areas there are very few jobs, other than those in subsistence agriculture and the informal sector. This lack of economic opportunity, coupled with the overcrowding and general degradation of the land, makes it virtually inevitable that those who can, leave to find work in the cities and on the mines.

The study in the Nkandla area showed that 76 percent of the households had members away as migrant workers, 83 percent of whom were men, mostly in the 20 — 50 year age bracket. Most of the migrants (77 percent) sent money back to their families on a regular basis. However, the amounts sent back were small and typically ranged between R12 and R22 per month. When one remembers that urban African wages in 1983 averaged from R800 — R1 200 a year, it is clear that migrants are able to send home only a small proportion of their urban wage earnings.³

The low average remittance rates coupled with the virtual absence of local work opportunities and a high rate of migration amongst men, mean that the face of rural poverty in KwaZulu — indeed in South Africa as a whole — is not only black but it is also usually female. Indeed it is the women, the children and the old people who bear the brunt of the suffering caused by the poverty in the black rural areas.

The mechanisms of the migrant labour system also contribute to the persistence of the cycle of rural poverty. The high absentee rate amongst men of working age increases the work burden placed on those adults who remain in the rural areas. Typically, dependency burdens (the ratio of non-economically active individuals to economically active), in black rural areas are 35 percent higher than the average for South Africa as a whole.



Further, the very low ratios of men to women in the age groups 15 — 64 years means that families in these rural areas lack sufficient of the masculine influence — children grow up in a fatherless world and a large number of women shoulder the burden of raising a family alone, with only economic assistance from their menfolk — and often that is sporadic.

INCREASED GAP

It also seems that the migrant labour system itself contributes to the general level of underdevelopment found in the black rural areas, as it militates against investment and technical progress in the regions supplying the migrants. By doing this, it acts to increase the gap between the returns on investment in agriculture and those from migrant labour, rather than to introduce conditions that would

equalise these returns. The somewhat anomalous relationship operates in the following manner.

Firstly, the migration process is age- and education-selective in nature with the chance of a person migrating being significantly higher than average amongst the young and the better educated.⁴ As youth is the innovator of most change, a high rate of absence amongst those aged under forty years, means that it becomes increasingly difficult to introduce new techniques in an area so denuded of men in those age groups. In a rural African context where the man is traditionally the decision maker, this effect is reinforced and the decision making process becomes increasingly cumbersome as the proportion of men who are absent from the area rises.

Secondly, innovation in agriculture requires investment. The low level of remittances by migrants to the rural areas, coupled with the low levels of productivity in the areas themselves, which are intensified by the drain imposed by the continued residence of the migrant's dependents, means that rural family incomes are too small to permit any substantial savings to be made out of these incomes.

Thirdly, the massive transfer of labour from the homeland rural areas to the urban areas alters both the economic and social relationships in these communities. Changing demand patterns in the job market have encouraged innovations and changes in techniques that will facilitate the acquisition of jobs in the modern sector. Hence one finds a substantial growth in investment by the black rural family in education and in labour saving equipment on the farm, such as cultivators and ploughs, in order, firstly, to fit the emergent worker for a job in the modern sector and, secondly, to free him from his traditional tasks so that he can take up the desired occupation.⁵

NO ALLEVIATION

In a number of studies of labour migration in other African countries, it has been argued that the process can lead not only to the alleviation of immediate sufferings from rural poverty but also the generation of development in the areas from which the migrants come.⁶

This does not seem to be the case in KwaZulu. Participation in the migrant labour system seems instead to be the engine for the further underdevelopment of the rural areas. It distorts the social and economic relationships to the point where the market acts to reinforce the imbalances in the system rather than to correct them. There is no tendency to stability in the system; migration continues and indeed the rate of migration increases as the general impoverishment of the rural areas rises, intensifying the problem. Investment in agriculture all but ceases, past capital accumulation is consumed by neglect and traditional agriculture stagnates. The inhabitants of the region become totally reliant upon the modern sector: even their very existence depends upon the remittances received from the absent migrants.

Policies to Combat Rural Poverty

Poverty-stricken people are largely poor because they were born poor, born encapsulated in the conditions that perpetuate poverty; malnutrition, disease, poor education facilities and generally low levels of public amenities, and are surrounded by others who are poor like themselves.

Poverty generates poverty and because it is a trap situation, it is very difficult to break into the cycle.

Rural poverty in South Africa stems from three main sources — firstly, the relative underdevelopment of the areas in which the major proportion of Black South Africans live. Secondly, the constitutional controls over the movement of Africans between regions, which have led to the growth of the migrant labour system and have severely restricted the rights of Africans who are not migrant workers to leave these underdeveloped areas. Whilst the third source of poverty is discrimination. Racial discrimination in the past in South Africa has limited the access of blacks to education and training, as well as confining them to the lower rungs of the job ladder. Black women seem to be particularly hard hit and are 'crowded' into the low productivity jobs. The problem is complicated, as we have seen, by the extent to which the system of temporary migration has denuded the black rural areas of economically active men, whilst at the same time the population pressure on the land has steadily increased.

Under these conditions, it seems imperative that a significant part of any policy package designed to alleviate black rural poverty is devoted to encouraging a greater degree of urbanisation amongst blacks, with a concomitant reduction in the size of the flow of migrants. The permanent settlement of the migrant work force would eliminate one of the major causes of rural poverty, namely the misallocation of resources within the family. In a situation in which the worker maintained only one home, he would be highly unlikely to consume nearly four-fifths of his earnings, leaving only the remaining fifth for his family.

An attitudinal survey undertaken amongst migrant workers by Professor Schlemmer and Dr. Moller showed that many migrants, particularly those in the younger age groups, did not wish to retain their rural links and were quite ready to settle permanently in the urban areas in which they worked. The remainder, however, had retained strong links with the rural community and wished to return there on completion of their workspan in the modern sector. This division is of great importance from a policy viewpoint, as it may provide the basis on which a voluntary population resettlement program could be built.

DETERMINANTS

A recent study of the determinants of regional growth in South Africa suggests that, as far as the underdeveloped areas of South Africa are concerned, two factors are particularly important in increasing the level of area output per head: agricultural productivity, and the level of government expenditure. Since output per man in agriculture can be increased either by increasing output or by reducing the labour input, the first of these, agricultural productivity, again emphasises the need for both rural development and increased urbanisation.

The second determinant of development in these backward areas, was the relative level of government activity in these regions. This reflects the fact that rural dwellers are not only poorer, they find it more difficult to obtain education, more difficult to obtain a productive job, have further to go to obtain health care, suffer from higher levels of malnutrition and are less well served with basic public amenities, such as access to clean water, roads, transport, post offices and stores. The lack of an adequate social infrastructure not only lowers the quality of life in these areas,



but also militates against further development, particularly as far as the private sector is concerned, as it increases both the establishment costs and the level of risk faced by an enterprise seeking to locate in these areas.

Finally, underdevelopment and poverty have a political, as well as an economic aspect to them. Since economic development patterns tend to reinforce themselves, any measures that are designed to change these patterns, will have to be vigorously implemented. In South Africa, a significant proportion of rural poverty results directly from moves that have been taken in the political arena – firstly to limit black access to the regions of the country that offer greater economic opportunity and, secondly, once they have gained entry, to limit black advancement in these areas. These sources of poverty are unlikely to be eliminated without meaningful political reform. Not political reform that is pitched at satisfying the aspirations of the economic ‘haves’, but true reform. Reform that enfranchises the ‘have nots’, in a political system that will enable their political muscle to influence the allocation of economic resources – particularly public sector resources – in their favour. □

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