

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY  
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Address from the President of the  
Carnegie Corporation of New York

David Hamburg

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At the opening session of this conference, some very kind remarks were made about the Carnegie Corporation in respect to the Carnegie Commission on Poor Whites, published in 1932 and the present Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development. My colleagues and I are of course grateful for your positive attitudes toward us and for your generous hospitality in this beautiful city and elsewhere. But the shoe is on the other foot. We must feel deeply indebted to you for undertaking this path-breaking research with so much vision, compassion, intellectual discipline and courage. It is an enterprise which should not only be useful in South Africa, but throughout the world. The problems you have addressed so effectively are of great significance in many countries of the world, including our own. In the coming year, I very much hope that the Carnegie Corporation can be helpful in disseminating the findings of your work, and further clarifying its significance, within your country and ours.

In expressing my heartfelt appreciation, I refer to all of you who have so constructively participated in the studies and the conference. I refer especially to Francis Wilson and his fine colleagues at the University of Cape Town for their brilliant and tireless work in providing the leadership, and making it all happen. We especially admire the fact that this Inquiry, unlike the first one a half-century ago, has actively and substantially involved people of all races and social groupings, working together in mutual respect for a great purpose.

I invited a rather large delegation of Carnegie colleagues to accompany me to this conference. That they accepted with alacrity reflects the importance we attach to this subject and the respect we hold for those conducting this Inquiry. During the past week, we have been studying intensively to learn all we can about the problems and opportunities that

lie before us all -- in this country and elsewhere -- to overcome poverty and its deadly manifestations.

Let me identify my colleagues. John Taylor, Chairman of the Board of the Carnegie Corporation; Helene Kaplan, Vice Chairman of the Board; Professor Ruth Hamilton of Michigan State University, a member of the Carnegie Board and also a member of the Thomas Commission on United States policy toward South Africa; Alan Pifer, President Emeritus of the Carnegie Corporation and also a member of the Thomas Commission; David Robinson, Executive Vice President of Carnegie; and David Hood, consultant to the foundation who collaborated with Francis Wilson in bringing this Inquiry to life. All of us have been deeply affected by this week. We have been on a rapid learning curve. We have been informed, stimulated, sometimes shocked, and brought to a renewed dedication to tackle the horrendous problems of human impoverishment in the spirit of this Inquiry.

The studies leading up to this conference have documented the many faces of poverty to an extent that has rarely been achieved in any country. The participants in this research certainly deserve our respect and admiration, especially since much of the research was necessarily done under difficult and distressing circumstances.

In light of my medical background, I have been especially struck by the documentation of links between poverty and disease. Such links were called to our attention at the opening session by Vice-Chancellor Saunders and have been strengthened day after day as the conference proceeded. Examples include tuberculosis, amebiasis, vitamin-deficiency diseases, cholera, malaria, measles, lead poisoning and rheumatic fever, among others. After listening to these papers, I am tempted to post a reward

for the identification of any disease which is not linked to poverty!

In short, impoverished people are at high risk of suffering from a wide variety of diseases, prominent among which are infectious diseases. This latter point is tragically ironic in view of the fact that infectious diseases have been drastically diminished in technically advanced societies -- and South Africa is after all a technically advanced society, at least in part. In Europe, North America, and Japan, infectious diseases have yielded to a constructive combination of adequate nutrition, clean water, efficient sanitation, decrease of over-crowding, immunizations and antibiotics. Altogether, this decline in infectious diseases represents the greatest health progress made in human history.

South Africa could catch up in health with other technically advanced countries in a relatively short time -- to the great benefit of its own people and its future as a nation.

There are many useful interventions for this purpose that are not expensive. Indeed, their efficiency has been demonstrated scientifically and in large-scale practice in many countries all over the world, some of which are less technically advanced and less affluent than South Africa. This conference has been replete with the data necessary for such interventions, and illuminating steps toward a coherent strategy. A national commitment would be required to implement such a strategy.

What are examples of useful interventions to diminish the scourge of infectious -- and other -- diseases? Let me briefly give a few:

1. Pre-natal care, especially early in pregnancy, with emphasis on simple measures to prevent disease.

2. Education during pregnancy, focusing on good care of Mother and infant, with special attention to nutrition; birth spacing with respect to any subsequent pregnancy; self-care regarding future health in the framework of simple disease prevention; and orientation to improving life chances for the young Mother beyond her pregnancy.
3. The encouragement and facilitation of prolonged breastfeeding.
4. Immunizations.
5. Oral rehydration for diarrheal diseases, including the education of mothers about when and how to do it.
6. Guidance in the use of indigenous weaning foods, adapted to local circumstances.
7. The use of simple growth charts in community groups to detect early warning signs of malnutrition.
8. Community-organized pre-school education with concomitant nutrition supplementation and on-site immunization.
9. Community-based clinics, primarily staffed by community health workers, based in accessible sites, with a core of essential vaccines and antibiotics -- not the most

exotic ones -- and oriented to educating people on how best to take disease-preventing measures in their own communities.

You will note that such measures draw heavily on local initiative, community organization for health, and public education for health. Poor communities all over the world are moving in this direction, and I have had the privilege of seeing remarkable human ingenuity along these lines in even the poorest South African communities. The human spirit and talent are there. I see too that the technical capability and professional commitment are here in this conference, linked to some of these poor communities. More linkages are needed; and a modicum of resources will be needed from affluent sectors of South African society -- be they governmental or private, perhaps both.

The human costs of poverty are truly disheartening. In particular, the burden of early death and long-term disability is exceedingly heavy. Severe and common infectious diseases take the lives of a great many South African infants before they reach one year of age, and handicap for life many of those that survive. Susceptibility to a wide range of diseases is heightened by the marginal character of subsistence which characterizes rural South Africa. And research presented at this conference demonstrates that child health is worsened by the widespread breakup of the family structure, with one parent -- and sometimes both -- separated from their children for long and indefinite periods of time, measured in years. This set of facts raises ethical questions for a country with strong technical capability and with the material resources to meet basic human needs, including a secure family life. Francis Wilson, our esteemed project and conference director, has observed that there are places in South Africa where people walk ten kilometers to fetch water when simple plastic tubing,

easily installed with low cost and low technical skill, could ease one of the most fundamental hardships of rural life, providing clean water where and when needed. And the provision of primary health care is certainly not beyond the capacity of this technically advanced society.

Positive contributions to individual human development can spur social development. Studies from many parts of the world, including some of the work presented during this conference, show that education can have powerful effects on fertility, child health, and nutrition. This fact has strong implications for strategies of development. For example, research shows that the education of girls is a remarkably promising intervention in underdeveloped communities. It is a potent investment in future economic growth and well-being, even where most women do not enter the labor force. Most girls in rural areas become mothers, and their influence on their children is crucial. In health, studies in Bangladesh, Kenya and Colombia show that children are less likely to die, the more educated their mothers, even controlling for differences in family income. In nutrition, among households surveyed in Sao Paulo, Brazil, for any given income level, families were better fed the higher the mother's education. In fertility, education delays marriage for women, partly by increasing their chances for employment; and educated women are more likely to know about and use contraceptives.

This is an area of intrinsic value -- the human dignity and decency involved in raising the status of women. It has additional practical value of far-reaching significance in widening skills and choices, as well as improving health, nutrition, and birth-spacing, -- all of which make this thrust a prime candidate for far-sighted strategies of social and economic development in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world.

Professor Wilson was very wise to use a broad concept of poverty in this Inquiry. In my view, poverty is partly a matter of income and partly a matter of human dignity. It is one thing to have a very low income, but to be treated with respect by your compatriots; it is quite another matter to have a very low income and to be harshly depreciated by more powerful compatriots. Let us speak then of human impoverishment: low income plus harsh disrespect. This condition jeopardizes survival in the most fundamental terms -- e.g. it drastically increases infant mortality, increases the burden of illness in many ways, and shortens life expectancy. But it does even more. It gravely jeopardizes the most fundamental human attachments to family, friends, home and community; it undermines self-respect and a sense of belonging; it makes life profoundly unpredictable and insecure; it erodes hope for future improvement and the sense of worth as a human being.

Thus, to speak of impoverishment in this sense is to speak of human degradation so profound as to undermine any reasonable and decent standard of human life -- measured by whatever religious, scientific, or humanitarian standard. Any outlook of human decency in any part of the world is inconsistent with the persistence of such impoverishment in the twenty first century.

We live in a time of astounding technical advance. Perhaps this can best be appreciated by reflecting for a moment on the time scale of human evolution. This is especially appropriate since we meet in Africa. So far as science can determine, Africa is the place where the human species began; and Africa is the continent where most of the important discoveries about human origins have recently been made. So when we come to Africa from anywhere else in the world, we are coming home: this is where we began, a very long time ago.

Over the past several million years, our ancestors lived in small, intimate groups with only the simplest tools to help them adapt for survival. They had to cope with profound dangers: periodic jeopardy to essential food supply; predators; extreme climatic variations; variable access to water; and many other vicissitudes of nature that were far beyond their control. To cope effectively, they had to rely not only on their wits and tools, but above all on their solidarity, cooperation, joint action and mutual support in the face of nature's hard blows. Even so, their casualties were heavy, their vulnerability great. At the time when they invented agriculture about ten thousand years ago, there were probably more baboons on earth than people. So recently as that, on an evolutionary time scale, human life was very precarious. Agriculture, as it came to be gradually implemented world-wide in the past few thousand years, gradually diminished that vulnerability. But the most drastic change in the long history of our species occurred only about two centuries ago with the onset of the industrial revolution: essentially the acceleration of technical advance and its application to human problems of adaptation. As it happened, and for reasons that may always remain obscure, this revolution occurred in the northern hemisphere -- a fact which was to have profound repercussions over the ensuing two centuries, some of which are painfully visible in South Africa today.

In short, light-skinned people in Europe developed powerful tools before dark-skinned people elsewhere. These tools permitted an explosive increase in the production of worldly goods during the past two centuries. For the first time in our long and arduous history as a species, we could achieve considerable control over our environment, far-reaching protection against old vulnerabilities, and many opportunities that never existed before.

Think for a moment what it means to have antibiotics and immunizations, science-based agriculture, airplanes and automobiles, radio and television, computers, temperature controlled-homes, safe and abundant water. Here in beautiful, modern Capetown, we can take these things for granted. But my grandfather did not have them at the onset of the twentieth century, even in the dynamic and prosperous United States. What a change a century can make! Indeed, human initiative has transformed the world in the twentieth century. An ordinary citizen of most technically advanced countries has opportunities and protections not available to Kings in earlier centuries.

In recent decades, largely in the second half of the twentieth century, science has been institutionalized on a vast scale for the first time, and the pace of advance in deep knowledge has accelerated precipitously -- knowledge of the structure of matter and of life, of the nature of the universe and of the human environment, even knowledge of ourselves. These scientific advances provide an unprecedented basis for technological innovation, and the pace of such innovation is now the most rapid in all of history -- e.g. in computers, telecommunications, biotechnology -- and alas weapons. The potential benefits of modern technology for human well-being are profound in every sphere: in food, water, health, communication, transportation, energy and human understanding in all its variegated splendor. This could mean the virtual elimination of human impoverishment in the next several decades.

But technology can be used in many ways. It can increase human suffering as well as relieve it. So far, technical advances have been both for better and for worse. Everywhere, those who have technical skills and advanced technology are powerful. They can, if they wish, turn their power against fellow humans who are weak, vulnerable, powerless or

perceived as menacing to them. The temptation to use power in this way has been almost irresistible in the modern world. Such behaviour could be readily observed almost anywhere in centuries past -- and right now! This conference has powerfully documented the presence of such behaviour in South Africa. It is a problem here of exceptionally grave dimension.

Please recall that the power of modern technology evolved first in Europe among light-skinned people. From that time to the present moment, there has been a tendency for light-skinned people not only to become more technically advanced and affluent, but also to depreciate, exploit, and even subjugate their dark-skinned brethren. This in my view is one of the most serious problems in the modern world, a root cause of human impoverishment, and a dilemma that has reached crisis proportions in South Africa.

In this context, it is useful to have another look at the first Carnegie Inquiry in this country. As you recall, it dealt with poverty among poor whites and is widely credited with having helped considerably in the process by which their poverty was overcome. So we of Carnegie are proud of it. Presumably it also says something encouraging about the South African society of that era -- after all, the poor whites emerged from poverty.

Yet that first Inquiry was only a partial success. It failed, like most of mankind in that era, to recognize fully the humanity of black Africans. It had little to say about them. They were, like so many dark-skinned people across the world, dimly viewed as peripheral to human society, almost as non-persons. And so the first inquiry largely left them out. One wonders how much impact that dilemma had on President Keppel of Carnegie, for within a decade he invited Gunnar Myrdal, a brilliant then-young Swedish scholar to examine racial problems in the United States.

The result was the classic study published in "The American Dilemma". It has probably had more constructive impact on American social progress than any other single inquiry in American history. Interestingly, Gunnar Myrdal then, like Francis Wilson now, involved black scholars of great ability in the enterprise.

It is poignant to find an injunction against group prejudice in a newspaper report of the work of the earlier poverty commission -- in language that could serve to describe aspects of the social context still at hand. The newspaper article observes:

"Many, perhaps the majority, of well-to-do South Africans have believed that the 'poor white' was really incapable of progress. They have not really faced the issue that these hundreds of thousands of human beings, if not transformed into an asset to South Africa must inevitably become a liability; that in short, they could not be merely left out of account. The effect of their attitude has been, therefore, that efforts to help the 'poor whites' has been left to the extremists along Nationalist thinkers, who have tended to produce solutions based on differences of race or colour instead of getting to grips with the economic situation". (Christchurch Press, New Zealand, 12/28/34).

This emphasis on inclusion rather than exclusion, and the focus on economic rather than racial policies could stand as a contemporary commentary on poverty in South Africa -- except now it is black poverty which we are mainly addressing, and the numbers are greatly multiplied. Rather than fifty years of effort to better integrate all South Africans into national life, much devotion has been given to excluding black South Africans from the benefits

of society, not least of all by deprivation of citizenship, the fundamental badge of social entitlement. This course has so shaped the texture of South African life that one can only wonder at what might have been accomplished by a similar concern for the welfare of black South Africans, over the fifty years since the first Carnegie report on poverty. Even as white poverty was being deplored there were those who urged that broader application be given to the economic integration of all South Africans. An article in The South African Outlook of March 1, 1933 observed: "We shall have to learn to view the Non-European population as an integral part of the socio-economic system of South Africa and to let them fit into the whole as effectively as possible, both as producers and consumers".

Yet, as this conference has documented, much of South Africa still cannot take for granted its ability to meet basic adaptive needs: food, water, shelter, and other factors essential for survival and human dignity. Why are there still widely prevalent threats to survival when modern science and technology have made such powerful contributions to South African society? And what can be done to diminish the kind of vulnerability that leads to desperation? The present Inquiry provides some answers to these questions in the structure and function of South African society.

The plight of the poor whites in the Twenties and Thirties had to be contended for in a hostile political atmosphere, in many respects as divisive and contentious as politics today. Indeed, the similarities between the reinforcing mechanisms of poverty fifty years ago, falling largely on the rural Afrikaner, and those of today, falling largely on the black community, are striking. But consider these basic differences of social and political condition: whites could own land in 1934, Africans cannot, by and large, in 1984; whites could move to the cities, with their families, at will, while today black South Africans are restricted by law from free movement or the opportunity to maintain an intact family life; and, not least of all,

considering the successful rise of Afrikaner nationalism, whites had the right to express themselves politically, to vote. And, whites were not physically moved from place to place, in implementation of rigid segregation. These are painful facts, and they cannot be avoided in any serious effort to address human impoverishment in this country.

Let me make it clear that the Carnegie Corporation is not "picking on" South Africa, not selecting it for unique prejudicial scrutiny. We are supporting work in our own country and elsewhere that aims to illuminate and overcome human impoverishment. Here we are fundamentally trying to be helpful to all South Africans, just as our predecessors tried to be helpful to the poor whites a half-century ago. To do so, we must support honest and penetrating inquiry, letting it go wherever the evidence takes it. We must be true to our heritage, placing great value upon democratic institutions, universal education, equal opportunity, health for all the people, and compassion for human suffering. We recognize that these values are very hard to implement -- anywhere. But they are no less applicable to South Africa than to any other nation.

The human species is rapidly reaching a phase of its evolution in which its prodigious capacities for technical skill and social organization can eliminate human impoverishment. But to do so, it will have to take account of its own nature -- including ubiquitous tendencies toward prejudice, ethnocentrism, and violent conflict. I shall return to this in a moment.

The work of the present Inquiry, taken together with research and experience in other parts of the world, suggests to me several basic ingredients in the emergence from poverty. All are technically feasible and well within human capacities. Yet, putting these ingredients together in a way that permits fulfillment of the human potential is an exceedingly difficult task.

Very briefly stated, I think the ingredients are as follows:

1. Adequate health. This is not a counsel of perfection, let alone immortality. It is a condition in which most people in all societies have the vigor to carry on those functions we regard as centrally human; and in which we can learn to cope with the inevitable limitations of the human organism.
2. Education for adaptive skills. While I value education deeply for its own sake in every conceivable sphere of human inquiry, I emphasize here those skills that are most salient for adaptation and well-being in a particular setting, most likely to earn income and respect. I include not only cognitive and technical skills but interpersonal and organizational skills as well.
3. Mutual support. It is doubtful whether we can achieve good health and adaptive skills, let alone a zest for living, without some dependable social support network: family, friends, reference groups, community -- with the immense cultural variability that we must learn to respect. Whatever their cultural forms, such support networks tend to provide mutual aid in the face of the inevitable stresses of living, to facilitate health and education, and to provide opportunities for individuals.
4. A structure of opportunity. Given the immense biological variability among individuals in every human group, there will be a diversity of aptitudes and talents among children -- and a lot of talent in every human population.

For these latest qualities to come to fulfillment, open paths are needed. Life chances can be enhanced by an intact family -- up to a point. But a larger structure of opportunity is also necessary -- not only a mutually supportive network in the community of origin, but also in the larger society. The child, and especially the emerging young adult, needs a social context in which individual capabilities can be brought to bear on real-world circumstances. Otherwise, healthy child development -- despite all its intrinsic merits -- will accelerate the person into a brick wall. Where a structure of racial or other discrimination is entrenched, those of us who wish to overcome human impoverishment must find openings in the wall, parts of the wall that can be removed, then ways to bring down the walls of obstruction based on prejudice and ethnocentrism altogether.

Human societies have a pervasive tendency to make distinctions between good and bad people, between heroes and villains, between in-groups and out-groups. It seems easy for us to put ourselves at the center of the universe, attaching a strong positive value to ourselves and our group, while attaching a negative value to certain other people and their groups. It is prudent to assume that we are all, to some extent, susceptible to egocentric and ethnocentric tendencies. Moreover, the human species is one in which individuals and groups easily learn to blame others for whatever difficulties exist. A very difficult but not impossible task for humans is to identify positively with their own groups -- and yet avoid drastic depreciation of other groups.

The world is now, as it has been for a long time, awash in a sea of ethnocentrism, prejudice and violent conflict. What is new is the destructive power of our weaponry: nuclear, enhanced conventional, chemical and biological. Moreover, the world-wide spread of technical capability, the miniaturization of weapons and the upsurge of fanatical behaviour are occurring in ways that can readily provide the stuff of very deadly conflicts in every nook and cranny of the earth. To be blunt, we have as a species a rapidly growing capacity to make life everywhere absolutely miserable and disastrous. As if that were not enough, two nations already have the capacity totally to destroy the species, to make human life extinct.

I do not think we have the luxury any longer to indulge our prejudices and ethnocentrisms. They are anachronisms of our ancient past. The world-wide historical record is full of hateful and destructive indulgences based on religious, racial, and other distinctions -- holy wars of one sort or another. I know there are "tough-minded" men who believe that this is the human condition and we must make the most of it. But technology has passed them by, made their position unrealistic -- if not today, then tomorrow.

If we cannot learn to accommodate each other respectfully -- within nations and across nations -- we will destroy each other at such a rate that humanity will soon have little to cherish -- if indeed there is any humanity left on earth.

In such a world, South Africa has special significance. If the accommodation of diversity can occur here, it can occur anywhere. If entrenched hostilities can be reconciled here, the world will notice. If the structures of impoverishment can be changed here now as they were a half-century ago,

this time to foster development for all the people, it would indeed be cause for rejoicing everywhere. Let us fervently hope that the second Carnegie Inquiry will provide a landmark on this path.

These papers constitute the preliminary findings of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, and were prepared for presentation at a Conference at the University of Cape Town from 13-19 April, 1984.

The Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa was launched in April 1982, and is scheduled to run until June 1985.

Quoting (in context) from these preliminary papers with due acknowledgement is of course allowed, but for permission to reprint any material, or for further information about the Inquiry, please write to:

SALDRU  
School of Economics  
Robert Leslie Building  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7700