

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Socio-political structures in rural
areas, and their potential con-
tribution to community development
in Kwa Zulu

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SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN RURAL AREAS, AND THEIR POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN KWA ZULU.

1. Introduction:

An appraisal of socio-political structures in rural areas, in the context of community development, especially in the South African black communities, is a mammoth task. There are several factors which account for this view:

- i) the variables which contribute to underdevelopment at any particular time are numerous and complex;
- ii) it is very difficult to hold any of the variables constant for purposes of analysis, since, in most instances, what are regarded as causal variables may be the effects of other variables in the chain. For instance, education (relative ignorance) and undernourishment, are both causes and effects of poverty. There is often a vicious cycle as stated by St. Thomas Aquinas with regard to labourers, " Wage earners can never accumulate wealth, and because they are poor they become wage earners, and because they are wage earners they are poor. " ¹

The accepted definition of development is that it refers to a process which seeks to meet everyone's basic needs, i.e. food, clothing, shelter, education, health, sanitation, clean drinking water, and some public transport.² In the composition of rural development, this definition entails both a re-organisation and activation of economic, social and political variables. It is in the context of the complex nature of the factors which operate in underdevelopment that this paper, which is based on the research carried out in eight rural districts in Kwa Zulu, seeks to explain the peculiar position of local-level socio-political structures and their potential role in community development within the area. The paper focusses on economic and social costs, to communities, of maintaining traditional administrations within modernising imperatives. It is further argued that the present arrangement defeats the purpose of activating the three variables which constitute the pillars of community development, i.e. the social, economic and political components.

Admittedly, in most developing societies, traditional administrations tend to be both undemocratic and unrepresentative, (a function of the political development process where recruitment into positions is riddled with historical and cultural problems) however, in order to facilitate both development and modernisation, counterbalancing forces in the form of popularly elected bodies are encouraged. The thesis in this paper is that not only do traditional structures increase the economic marginality of rural areas, (here marginality is used to mean employment in low- productivity sectors, unproductive labour, intermittent employment, open unemployment and low-level subsistence production ³) but also that they are not properly equipped to play an effective role within modernising parameters into which community development falls.

2. Sociological and Demographic Factors in Kwa Zulu:

Kwa Zulu is characterised by the following socio- demographic factors:

- i) almost seventy percent of the economically active male population is working in the towns and cities outside rural Kwa Zulu as migrants; ⁴
- ii) partly as a result of the natural increase in the population and partly because of the removal of masses of people as a result of the Group Areas Act, the population densities in rural areas are rather high.

The above two factors result in two other complications:

- a) competition over meagre resources , especially the land;
- b) an inadequate manpower to maintain the vital functions as knowledgeable and able-bodied men migrate to the towns and cities for employment. The permanent population in rural areas thus consists mainly of women and children besides a few professionals , independent traders and a small percentage of self-supporting farmers.

3. Research Objectives:

The objectives of the research which forms the substance of this paper were twofold:

- i) to identify base- line socio-political structures in rural Kwa Zulu, as well as their mode of operation; and,
- ii) to assess the economic and social costs which these structures bear on the rural inhabitants of Kwa Zulu.

Indices used to measure these costs were:

- a) economic and social costs incurred by the communities in the process of acquiring basic resources such as land, pensions, disability grants etc;
- b) empowerment or its absence, of the communities in terms of participation in voluntary or popular organisations, role differentiation and structural autonomy within the organisations;
- c) the role of women within the organisational network especially since traditionally, women have always been disadvantaged and thus prevented from making a contribution commensurate with their potential and ability.

4. Methodology:

In the selection of respondents from districts, a multistage probability sampling technique was adopted. Heads of households or their wives qualified as subjects since the information required was factual in nature and in many instances pertained to the heads of households. A structured open-ended interview schedule was administered by trained interviewers in a face to face situation with respondents. The fieldwork was conducted between 25th of November 1982 and the 28th of February 1983.

5. Findings:

5.1. Economic Costs:

Access to basic resources by vast numbers of people in rural communities is beset with economic hardships which, by the standard of rural incomes, are significant. For instance:

- i) nine out every ten respondents who required a site on which to build a house had to make some monetary payment either to the chief or to the induna or even to both (88%). In addition, interviewees stated that they had to pay annually either for their sites or their fields, or even for both. (35%) In one area, in particular, inhabitants paid an annual levy of two rands for fields, and if this was not paid, they forfeited their rights to plough or plant on their fields on that particular year.
- ii) about a fifth of the respondents in the sample stated that the land was overcrowded, consequently, they had no fields on which to grow crops for domestic consumption. The distribution of the fields naturally favours the old established families, and newcomers have no allocations.
- iii) access to basic welfare resources such as pensions or disability grants was also beset with problems. Forty percent of the respondents in this sample alleged that it was common practice in their areas to pay the local induna before they could proceed with their applications either for pensions or disability grants. These payments were in the form of cash, paying the induna's bus fare to the commissioner's office, buying him lunch or in some instances, a fixed portion of the first pension payment. In addition, some respondents, (6%) reported " bribes " to the clerks at the commissioners' offices. Apparently, there is a collusion between izinduna and clerks as respondents alleged that the latter refused to attend to applicants unless they were in the company of an induna or councillor.

5.2 Participation:

One of the objectives of this research was to establish the extent to which the communities, in question, took the

responsibility to organise their lives. To this end an enquiry, on the organisational network as well as areas of activity around which the communities organised, was made in order to:

- i) assess the extent to which the human potential is effectively utilised in rural areas; and,
- ii) identify the structures or bodies which facilitate such organisation.

The most commonly mentioned organisations were as follows:

ORGANISATION:	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS*
Women's garden clubs	48
Farmers' associations	37
Inkatha	15
Sewing clubs	13
Other	6
No organisations	19
Don't know	7

The next question focussed on eliciting the degree to which the respondents were involved in the organisational machinery in their areas. The following table illustrates:

ORGANISATION'S MODE OF OPERATION:	% OF RESPONDENTS:
An elected executive	36
Local officials/Government appointees	10
Educated people	5
Don't know	23
No organisations	19
Not a member	7

The second table reveals that while the organisations are fairly well known, there is a relative degree of ignorance with regard to the way in which the organisations function. This reflects either apathy or non-involvement by the masses in their organisations as amplified in the substantial number of " don't knows " " not a member " and " no organisations " (total = 49%). What brings more concern is that the organisations are not equitably distributed in all the districts.

The coastal districts, i.e. the sugar belt area, commands a fair share in the farmers' associations, perhaps an indication of the efforts by organised industry such as the South African Sugar Industry, to try and effect community development within their sphere of influence. The rest of the areas have very little organised activities.

When the respondents were asked to indicate the areas of activity around which they met to discuss or to try and solve problems at community level, the following responses were recorded:

SPHERE OF ACTIVITY:	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES:
Inkatha	29
School issues	27
General meetings (non specific)	21
Water crisis	14
Specific clubs and associations	8
Zoning and resettlements	6
On conduct and disciplinary matters	3
Do not attend meetings	5
No community meetings	25

On further enquiring if chiefs and izinduna made any contributions to community participation, the responses were that they mostly convened meetings to make announcements from the government or when they needed levies from the people. (39% for chiefs and 13 % for izinduna.) However, chiefs and izinduna were also involved in community issues even if not substantially. For instance, they convened meetings on community issues in about a third of the cases, (33% and 29% respectively).

An analysis of community participation by district indicated that community involvement decreased with an increase in respondents' negative perception of local authorities. Secondly, the results demonstrated that while rural communities may be broadly described as low in organised participation, there was ample evidence of involvement in activities

where there were immediate spin offs, such as in school committees, and organised farming like growing sugar cane. Inkatha could also form a strong organisational base which could act as a facilitator for community mass-based participation. What the people lack, is a goal-oriented leadership to supply the technical and managerial know-how.

5.3 Social Costs:

5.3.1 Alienation:

Respondents in the sample felt uneasy about the manner in which local authorities operated in their areas. Feelings ranged from mild condemnation of to complete alienation from these authorities. Issues which evoked a considerable degree of anger were:

- i) payments for sites and fields;
- ii) payment, inconvenience and hassles that members of the various communities have to put up with in the applications for pensions and disability grants;
- iii) the response and attitudes of local authority structures to inputs from below. Apparently, chiefs, izinduna and councillors perceive themselves as masters rather than the servants of the people they are meant to serve.

The critical point in these allegations is that for mass-based community development to succeed, co-operation between authorities and villagers is a sine qua non. In the relationship between tribal authorities and the people, this is an attribute which is conspicuous by its absence. The message from this research is that chiefs, izinduna and councillors have, by misrepresentation, given their institutions scorn, low esteem and hate from the people. This is in spite of the culture of silence which characterises village life.

A closer examination of the tribal authority system which forms the base-line socio-political and administrative structure in rural areas reveals that:

- i) It is more of an extension of the state apparatus than an organ representing the people. Its functions thus tend to concentrate on the bureaucratic demands rather than on the co-ordination, articulation and aggregation of popular wishes. However, even as an administrative structure, its functions are derivative, this is particularly true with regard to broader issues of policy such as resettlements and the Group Areas Act. Such a position creates various impasses where people blame the local structures for what is, otherwise, the responsibility of the political super-structure.
- ii) The alleged inefficiency of the tribal authority system is aggravated by the absence of job descriptions for incumbents in positions. As a mixture of the administrative and representative systems, it serves conflicting interests from two parties; the result is that the majority of the incumbents do not fit into the jobs they are meant to perform, especially within a modernising context.
- iii) Whilst most bureaucratic positions need some amount of training, in order to streamline performance, this is not the case with tribal authorities. As a consequence of this, besides the general problems associated with bureaucracies, such as red tape and undue delays, tribal authorities tend to be dysfunctional as expressed by respondents in this research. These observations might have serious implications for development.

6. Conclusion:

In conclusion, it must be restated that, in underdeveloped countries, the relationship between structures which play a determining role in the allocation and distribution of resources, and the people, has direct consequences for development.

Secondly, one needs to stress that the circumstances surrounding tribal authorities in Kwa Zulu obtain in most underdeveloped areas, and that the results as expressed in this paper do not apply indiscriminately to all tribal authorities. However, the occurrence of the stated shortcomings allows sufficient ground for one to formulate substantiated generalisations.

1. The economic constraints which prevail in rural Kwa Zulu are exacerbated rather than alleviated by an authority system which is out of tune with modernising demands. While some people may argue that what these authorities are doing is no more than carry out old established customs, the crux of the matter is that in today's economic terms, the people can no longer afford to sustain old reciprocities and gift exchanges amidst poverty and deprivation.

2. The social costs of maintaining traditional administrations within a modernising context can only encourage alienation from such structures, by the rural masses. This militates against co-operation and poses as an obstacle to development.

3. Evidently, traditional authority structures in Kwa Zulu, are not based on any representative or democratic principles, especially after the interference by colonial powers with the traditional representative system as it operated prior to 1878 in Natal. This practice is contrary to the principle of empowerment which encourages community participation in day to day affairs of the people. As these authority structures do not consider themselves accountable to the population, there are, at times, sufficient bottlenecks to paralyse development for considerable periods of time. For instance, in one district covered in this survey, conflict between the traditional authority and the people, has created an impasse which has resulted in the suspension of developmental programmes for over a year.

Finally, one should point out that there is a noticeable willingness among rural inhabitants for participating in development programmes, what is needed are properly trained personnel to guide the masses of rural folk to their desired goals. This reinforces the stand taken by those conflict theorists who emphasise that villagers are rational, calculating and opportunistic.

Footnotes:

1. Pitirim A. Sorokin: " What is Social Class ? " in Paul Blumberg : " The Impact Of Social Class - A Book of Readings " Harper and Row Publishers, New York 1972 p 90.

2. S. G. Aziz: " Rural Development; Learning From China " The Macmillan Press Ltd London 1978.

3. Alec Erwin and Eddy Webster: " Ideology and Capitalism in South Africa " in Schlemmer, L. and Webster, E. " Change, Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa " Ravan Press, Johannesburg. 1978.

4. Nattrass, J. " The Migrant Labour System and South African Economic Development. 1936-1970 " Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of Natal, Durban 1976.

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.

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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:

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