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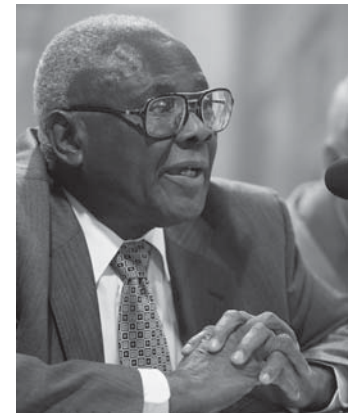
THE AFRICAN CASE

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For many developing countries particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa the pervasive nature of urban poverty constitutes an enormous challenge to their development effort. The burgeoning streams of rural-urban migrations arising partly from failure to significantly improve on agricultural productivity and living conditions in rural areas and partly from the relative attractions of urban centers have tended to fuel the growth and expansion of poverty regimes within urban areas. Two decades of research on poverty, however, indicate that we are still far from fully understanding the many strands of issues that condemn individuals and communities especially in urban and metropolitan areas of developed and developing countries to being mired in the web of poverty or being unable to pull themselves out of poverty. The situation in sub-Saharan Africa deserves special attention both because the region presently has the fastest rate of urbanization in the world but also because, unlike elsewhere in the world, the incidence of poverty continues to deepen in most countries of the region.

This paper is divided into five parts. The first begins by raising the question of what is “urban” about poverty? It examines attempts that have been made to identify the special characteristics of urban poverty whilst the second part goes on to consider the special case of sub-Saharan Africa. A third part then attempts to provide a conceptual framework based on a political economy approach for understanding the situation. It posits that the deepening poverty situation in Africa has arisen largely because of the incomplete insertion into the global free market economy of a region that is still essentially pre-capitalist in terms of its institutions, value systems and behavioral responses that are still poorly aligned to the demands of that market. The fourth part contextualizes this approach by showing how, in spite of the incomplete transition, societies in sub-Saharan Africa have been trying, through various forms of “institutional radicalization”, to meet the challenges of a free market economy and the indeterminate results of these endeavors in terms of the overall development of the region. This conceptualization enables a better appreciation



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of why attempts at urban poverty reduction all over the continent have been relatively unimpressive especially in the context of a continuing and sustained heavy surge of rural-urban migration. The fifth part then articulates an urban poverty research agenda emphasizing the policy and practical implications of the conjunctural situation of poor municipalities confronting the challenges of urban poverty. A concluding section notes the importance for state, multilateral banks and international development agencies of paying greater attention to not only state-based strategies for poverty reduction but also the emerging institutions within civil society in which the urban poor have been and continue to mobilize themselves for the struggle of upward socio-economic mobility in spite of their incapacities to operate effectively within a free market economy.

WHAT IS "URBAN" ABOUT POVERTY?

In his address to the high session of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in June, 1993 in Geneva, Switzerland, the Secretary-General called attention to the fact that poverty is another face of the generally dehumanizing phenomenon of deprivation. To quote him:

Deprivation is a multi-dimensional concept. In the sphere of economics, deprivation manifests itself as poverty; in politics, as marginalization; in social relations, as discrimination; in culture, as rootlessness; in ecology, as vulnerability. The different forms of deprivation reinforce one another. Often the same household, the same region, the same country is the victim of all these forms of deprivation. We must attack deprivation in all its forms. None of the other dimensions of deprivation, however, can be tackled unless we address the problem of poverty and unemployment (United Nations, 1993).

This conceptualization allows us to see poverty in a web of deprivation, a criss-crossing of circumstances serving as a trap from which, once caught, it is difficult to escape without assistance. It emphasizes that what the poor lose by being caught in the trap is more than a matter of income and assets. Being poor means that a person is marginalized from the decision-making process of his community; is discriminated against in society; feels generally that he has no abiding roots in the community; is usually displaced to the more envi-

ronmentally unsafe areas of societal space; and he and his family members, particularly women and children, are vulnerable to various hazards and threats.

Notionally, poverty is defined in absolute and relative terms. According to Seragledin (1989: 23), absolute poverty is the inability to secure the minimum basic needs for human survival according to standards so low that they challenge the adequate comprehension of most members of an industrial society, a condition that Robert MacNamara rightly labelled as beneath any concept of human dignity. Relative poverty, on the other hand, relates to the condition of the lower 30 or 40 per cent of the income distribution in any country and embraces those who, although barely securing the minimum basic needs, have such limited resources that they lack the means for adequate social participation. Such people are effectively marginalized from the mainstream of society, even though they may constitute a majority of the population.

These definitions have been particularly useful in establishing quantitative indicators of poverty. Such indicators include, for instance, per capita income, per capita consumption, per capita food consumption, food ratio, caloric intake and medical data particularly as a measure of the adverse effects of poverty on children. Nonetheless, nothing about these various measures of poverty specifically differentiates between urban and rural poverty. It is thus pertinent to ask the question whether there is anything specifically "urban" about poverty. The question is particularly relevant given certain known characteristics about urban settlements. Urban settlements have been defined as large, compact, densely built-up areas where open space is often in short supply except at the periphery. Their population tends to be heterogenous and socially diversified such that kinship relationships are of minimal importance. Goods and services have largely been commoditized such that everything tends to have a price tag attached to it. Interaction and interpersonal relations are virtually contractual in nature with the maintenance of law and order being formal and impersonal. Governance requires electoral representation in a democratic setting and takes on a more sophisticated nature and compared with the situation in more distant rural settings.

Given these broad characteristics of urban settlements, Satterthwaite (2001: 146), argues that urban poverty tends to exhibit eight major aspects. These are:

(1) *Inadequate income* which gives rise to inadequate consumption of necessities including food and safe and sufficient water, problems of indebtedness with debt repayments significantly reducing income available for necessities; (2) *inadequate, unstable or risky asset base* both material and non-material including educational attainment and housing for individuals, households or communities; (3) *inadequate shelter* which is typically of poor quality, overcrowded and insecure; (4) *inadequate provision of "public" infrastructure* comprising piped water, sanitation, drainage, roads, footpaths, and so on which increases health burden and often work burden; (5) *inadequate provision of basic services* such as daycare centers, schools, vocational training centers, health-care clinics, emergency services units, public transport, communications and law enforcement; (6) *limited or no safety net* to ensure that basic consumption can be maintained when income falls as well as to ensure access to shelter and health care when these can no longer be paid for; (7) *inadequate protection of poorer groups' rights through the operation of the law* including laws and regulations regarding civil and political rights, occupational health and safety, pollution control, environmental health, protection from violence and other crimes, protection from discrimination and exploitation; and (8) *poorer groups' voicelessness and powerlessness* within political systems and bureaucratic structures, leading to little or no possibility of receiving entitlements; organizing; making demands; and getting a fair response. No means of ensuring accountability from aid agencies, NGOs, public agencies and private utilities.

The acuteness of the incidence of these various attributes of urban poverty can be expected to vary positively with the size of urban centers and are more likely to be extreme in metropolitan areas than in smaller cities. The importance of price levels following the commoditization of goods and services in urban areas can be particularly troublesome to the urban poor and compels them to seek measures such as urban agriculture to minimize their dependence on the market for their basic food needs. High density of settlement increases health risks and vulnerabilities which are further compounded by the location of settlements in marginal areas such as floodplains or mountainsides.

In the last quarter of the last century, many African countries have had to submit to the structural adjustment program promoted by Bretton Woods institutions

as the only way to restore the health of their economies. The operation of the program has meant cutting down on many social services and the retrenchment of many workers. This has pushed many marginal urban workers into poverty and requires that poverty be conceptualized as a dynamic phenomenon. This means in effect that the urban poor should not be considered as a homogenous group but as a social underclass undergoing continuous differentiation. Three categories of urban poor have thus recently been identified: the new poor; the borderline poor; and, the chronic poor (World Bank, 1988). The new poor is comprised largely of retrenched civil servants or employees laid off by public and private enterprises as a direct consequence of structural adjustment measures while the borderline poor are individuals and families, such as unskilled workers in urban industry, whose incomes, though not quite at poverty level, are so low that price increases resulting from the same structural adjustment program push them below the poverty line. The chronic poor include all those who were extremely poor even before the adjustment program was initiated and whose circumstances perhaps became worse because of it.

Increasingly, it is this last category of the chronically urban poor upon which research attention has recently focused. Chronic poverty in urban areas is seen as much more complex and much more visible than problems of acute need in rural areas. According to Mitlin (2003), "it is likely that the urban chronically poor live in diverse economic and political situations, facing different livelihood opportunities and different physical conditions. Furthermore, chronic poverty may be caused by the process of transition from rural to urban rather than the specific conditions in any particular urban settlement." Hulme, Moore and Shepherd (2002: 10) argue that "the defining feature of 'chronic poverty' is its extended duration. Poverty that is both severe and multi-dimensional but does not last a 'long' time is by its nature, not chronic." They suggest that poverty should endure for at least five years to be chronic.

WHY MAKE SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA "A SPECIAL CASE"?

The particular manifestation of chronic poverty in urban centers in sub-Saharan Africa is of special significance because of its close relation to the colonial history of the continent. Except for a few countries in West Africa

and on the east African coastland where there are examples of pre-colonial and pre-industrial towns and cities, urbanization in most of sub-Saharan Africa has been a novel colonial development. In many countries, during the colonial period, urban centers were the exclusive residence of white colonialists. The Africans, who provided menial labor for running these cities, were often housed in townships or left to survive as best they could in peri-urban shanty towns. With the end of the colonial regime and especially from the 1960 upwards, there was no more restraining factor and streams of migration into urban centers assumed deluge proportions.

Because of this, sub-Saharan Africa still remains the least urbanized of the continents. But it is a region where the rate of urbanization is fastest and consequently is posing very difficult challenges. The weakness of demographic data notwithstanding, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that African cities are experiencing phenomenal growth. National population growth rates in most sub-Saharan African countries are still well above the 2% per annum level whilst the urban growth rates are over 5%. Because of the generally high fertility throughout the region, rapid urban growth is noticeable not only in the very large cities but also in small and medium-size cities. Thus, all over sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage of people living in urban settlements grew to over 37% by the year 2000 and is expected to go beyond 50% before the year 2030. A situation in which half the African population will live in urban centers is sure to constitute a special crisis for poverty reduction, development and governance on at least four counts.

First, this high level of urbanization is not all due to rural-urban migration. Rather, much of it results from equally high levels of fertility within urban areas. In most other parts of the developing world but certainly in the earlier history of developed countries, urban growth was largely due to rural-urban migration. Because such migrants are usually in their most economically productive ages, their impact on the economies of the cities into which they migrate tends to be positive. Even where they can not participate in the formal economic sector, they find employment in the burgeoning informal sector. However, because antenatal and post-natal health facilities tend to be more concentrated and accessible in urban areas of sub-Saharan African countries, not only are fertility levels maintained at fairly high lev-

els in cities and towns but also infant mortality rates are greatly reduced. The result is that the contribution of natural increase to total urban population is much higher than that of rural-urban migrations with the consequence of a high dependency ratio of children to workers in many African cities. Nonetheless, the very rapid urban spread of HIV/AIDS, with infection rates estimated as four times higher in urban than rural areas in some African countries (Boerma et al., 1999), has led to significant increases in urban mortality. Moreover, the environmental conditions that many poor urban residents face have exposed them to life-threatening situations and have considerably undermined the urban advantage in mortality reduction in the region.

Secondly, unlike in Europe and other developed regions where labor demands of industrial and other secondary and tertiary activities fuelled major rural-urban migration during periods of rapid urbanization, no such sustained economic development was evidenced in sub-Saharan Africa. It is true that in the years immediately following political independence in the 1960s, the Africanization of the public service and the expansion of parastatal agencies led to a high rate of new employment creation in urban centers, particularly in capital cities and large regional centers. By the 1970s, these increases were further accelerated by the growth in employment opportunities in so-called import substituting industrialization and large-scale service sectors such as banking and tourism. However, with the sharp rise in oil prices after 1973, except for the few oil-producing countries, increasing foreign exchange was needed to maintain and sustain manufacturing bases. For some time, many countries hung on by incurring foreign loans. As the amount of indebtedness involved grew to be more than could be serviced by export earnings, many sub-Saharan African countries in the 1980s were forced to engage in some form of structural adjustment to their economies. Everywhere, it was a period of harsh economic reality in which an increasing proportion of the population was compelled to operate within the informal sector economy and many were pushed below the poverty line.

One of the major trends in the development of African cities especially from 1970 onwards has thus been the phenomenal growth of the informal economic sector. Indeed, many workers in formal employment often had to supplement their income by undertaking

informal activities. The International Labour Organization, defines informal sector employment on the basis of three out of many possible dimensions (Mead and Morrison, 1996). These are: whether a worker is self-employed; how large the size of the firm in which he works is; and whether such a firm is covered by government systems of employment registration, taxation, or regulation. On the basis of these three dimensions, the informal sector is defined as constituted by the self-employed, those who are working in firms with fewer than 5 employees, workers with no registration, owners of a family business with fewer than 5 employees, and family members working in a family business without a specified wage. Using such a definition, Arnaud (1998) estimated that in a number of West African cities today, fully 70 per cent of employment is informal.

Nonetheless, the view that urban labour markets are separable into formal and informal sectors with the formal sector offering high wages and long tenure, and the informal low wages and insecure employment is now recognized to be simplistic and in need of substantial review. Indeed, for most of sub-Saharan Africa, it has been noted that even where a formal sector wage advantage once existed, it has been eroded with time. Faur and Labaz (2000) noted that many informal sector enterprises, especially those in the intermediate range which are neither very small nor very large, have, on the whole, tended to be successful in their operations. They further observed that these enterprises rarely evolve from small units, except in the cases of civil engineering and transportation. Rather, they are typically formed by the transfer of commercial capital, and are created by investors with vocational training such as skilled workers who were made redundant in the formal sector. Thus, it is possible to speak in most African cities of an informal sector with an “upper” and “lower” tier, the former comprising of individuals and enterprises whose net earnings may exceed those in formal sector occupations. Consequently, although it is still true that many informal sector operators are poor, there are important exceptions often accounted for by operators in such activities as fabrication, wholesale produce trading, public transportation, hotelling, market trading, or renting out of houses in informal neighborhoods and so on, all of which tend to involve considerable initial investment.

Thirdly, and notwithstanding the above, it is very evident that poverty in most African countries now has

a very pervasive urban face. Up to the 1970s, export agricultural production supported a very high proportion of Africans living in the rural areas. Most of these operated well above the poverty line in spite of the generally subsistent nature of their agricultural practices. But as the prices for export produce became highly variable on the international market and agricultural wage employment fell or stagnated in many countries, poverty became a very pronounced feature of rural life. With governments at the same time promoting nation-wide primary and secondary education, the attractiveness of urban centers increased tremendously for the products of these rural educational institutions who could not gain sufficient incomes by working in subsistence agriculture. Thus, as situations in rural areas deteriorated, many youths both male and female migrated out of the rural areas into the slums and shanty settlements of urban centers.

For most African countries today, a significant proportion of these immigrants moved from rural to urban poverty. It is, of course, not difficult to appreciate that there are considerable differences between the two types of poverty. It is claimed, for instance, that for most of the rural poor it is the lack of an adequate asset base notably land and the price insecurity for their produce especially on the international market rather than a lack of income that underlies their poverty. Furthermore, in Sub-Saharan Africa, over 30 per cent of such poor rural households are female-headed (UNCHS, 1996: 109). But even in these cases, as long as subsistence production remains important, those with almost no income may be able to meet many of their nutritional, fuel and building material requirements from crops they grow and from drawing on “wastelands”, forests or woodlands which are open access or common property resources. But, once such people move to the city, they are generally faced by a monetized or commercialized environment. Reliance here is placed almost wholly on incomes or wages earned to obtain access to shelter, food, freshwater, fuel and other goods and services. This greater dependence on cash income for access to goods and services in urban areas results in the greater vulnerability of the urban poor.

Finally, within urban areas inadequacy of income becomes a significant factor underpinning many other deprivations that the urban poor are exposed to. Thus, the World Bank’s use of an average income level equivalent

to US\$1.00 per person per day for defining the poverty line must be taken as only indicative of numerous other non-monetary deprivations which the poor experience in urban areas. Low income certainly condemns most poor households not only to living in slums and shanty towns but also for these to be displaced frequently to floodplains or slopes vulnerable to land or mudslides after heavy rains. Low income makes it difficult for poor households to invest in social assets such as education that can help to reduce their vulnerability and that of their offsprings in the future. Low income also exposes the urban poor to a degree of social exclusion not only from basic needs but also from civil and political rights. In all of these, women and female-headed households are generally the more vulnerable. More than in the rural areas, the limited asset bases of the urban poor leave them particularly vulnerable to sudden economic shocks as well as to longer term crises such as serious illness and injury (Moser, 1998).

The dominance of the poor in African cities has thus resulted in the extensive development of slums and unplanned shanty settlements on the outskirts of large cities or heightened concentration of population in over-crowded living spaces in already deteriorating districts closer to the center of the cities. According to UN-HABITAT (2003: 33), as of 2001, nearly 72 per cent of the total urban population of sub-Saharan Africa, estimated at 231 million live in slums. In other words, some 54 out of every 100 residents of African cities live under slum conditions. Most of these slum dwellers are to be found living in large capital cities as well as in intermediate and small urban centers. Although one does not expect to see in the latter the overcrowding, pollution and insanitary conditions that characterize slums in the large cities nor the enormous pressure over land, there is evidence that service delivery in the small and medium cities is significantly poorer than in the bigger cities. The situation has gotten considerably worse in the last decade in those countries of sub-Saharan Africa which have been experiencing armed conflicts. These war-torn countries, comprising over one-third of those in sub-Saharan Africa, have had to contend with the destruction of physical investments and infrastructures representing years of effort and labour, the annihilation of social capital, the tearing apart of the economic fabric of communities as well as the erosion of institutional structures, all of which

makes it difficult for these communities to cope with the incalculable damages and losses inflicted on them or to have access to basic services except through charity and the institutionalized generosity of the UNCHR (the United Nations Commission for Human Refugees).

It is not only the effect of colonialism but also the post-colonial performance of African governments that have made an impact on the poverty situation in African cities and require that any consideration of urban poverty pay special attention to the peculiar political history of the region. Soon after independence, it was assumed that development and unity required a strong, highly centralized state and that local governing institutions were mainly of distracting significance. The state saw itself as “the one that designs institutions so that the center can dominate all other organizations. Whether it be markets, schools, universities, local or regional governments, trade unions or political parties, the center seeks control. Unity is confused with uniformity and all opinions contrary to those expressed by the state and its officials are regarded as “threatening” (Wunsch & Olowu, 1990: 297). In such a situation, the state began to appear irrelevant to the major interests and aspirations of the citizen whose characteristic response to its dictates is one of resistance and alienation. Overconcentration of power at the level of the central government, either through being a one-party or a military regime, became pervasive for most of the post-independent period almost up to the end of the 20th century. This discouraged concern with transparency and accountability in governance. The state also sought to control much of the country’s economic life through the establishment of innumerable parastatals ostensibly to provide needed services and goods for which the private sector was adjudged at that time incapable or unwilling to engage in providing but in truth to enhance the power of the state to dispense patronage and largesse. All of this promoted rampant corruption and malfeasance in national life, undermined productive effort generally, fostered the growth of a “rent-seeking” mentality in the population, and impacted negatively the economic growth and development in the region. To a large extent, therefore, overcentralization of state power both in the political and economic spheres became responsible for most African states exhibiting characteristics of “failed states” in the last quarter of the 20th century.

In such a situation, it is no wonder that poverty trends, among other negative features of the various countries, deepened further. Efforts to turn around the general depressing conditions in many of these countries saw emphasis being put on decentralization and democratization as well as on the promotion of a free market economy and the greater involvement of the private sector in the economy of the countries. However, all over Africa, almost without exception these early efforts at decentralization came to grief (Laley and Olowu, 1989). Part of the reason for this was that what was being decentralized was often not power or resources but mainly governmental activities, a process which is now more correctly referred to as deconcentration. The people involved in the so-called “decentralization” process were invariably lower level bureaucrats. Where an elected council is involved, it is usually made responsible to a higher authority and not to the people who elected it. Consequently, where poverty alleviation is concerned, the failure or success of such bureaucrats or assembly, cannot be anything different from the performance of the national government itself.

POSITING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Given these pre-dominant state-society relations, how does one proceed to elucidate the urban poverty situation in sub-Saharan Africa? How does one explain how and why African cities present a situation so contrary to the general global trend of declining urban poverty? How does one attempt an explanation of a situation in which in spite of efforts in recent years by multilateral organizations, bilateral donor agencies, central and even local governments, and foreign and local non-governmental and community-based organizations, relative and absolute incidence of chronic poverty continues to rise whilst poverty reduction remains a formidable challenge to development efforts in most countries?

In positing a conceptual framework for understanding urban poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, it is necessary to begin again by situating the phenomenon within a pre-colonial historical and political economy context so as to recognize where these countries are coming from and how far and how well they have come. At the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884, which heralded the era of European colonization of the continent, the mode of production over most of Africa was largely

pre-capitalist. Societal progress had been disrupted during the preceding four centuries due to the Arab and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The pre-capitalist economies of most of the countries were essentially peasant-based. Unlike elsewhere in the world, the feudal mode of organization was poorly developed except in a few areas such as in Uganda, Ethiopia and part of northern Nigeria. The fundamental point to remember about the various colonial economies which the colonial powers tried to integrate into the global capitalist economy at the beginning of the 20th century was the fact that they were essentially pre-feudal, peasant-based economies.

Nonetheless, Moore (1966) observed that the road to modern society everywhere had been completed at the expense of the peasantry. In the industrialized world, other social classes have taken control of the instruments of state and used these to curtail the freedom of the peasants and to reform, ‘marginalize’ or ‘proletarianize’ their claims to primordial societal assets especially of land and labor. In Africa, however, the peasant has remained virtually independent not only by his position as producer with direct access to land and the labor of his family members but also by his ability to secure his own reproduction without significant dependence on other social classes. This has provoked the argument that there can be no serious understanding and resolution of the development crisis in Africa without recognition of the historical uniqueness of the African peasantry. According to Hyden (1980: 9)

Nowhere in the world have other social classes risen to power without making the many small and independent rural producers subordinate to their demands.... Africa is the only continent where the peasants have not yet been captured by other social classes. By being owners of their own means of production, the many smallholder peasants in Africa have enjoyed a degree of independence from other social classes large enough to make them influence the course of events on the continent.

Such recognition of the fundamental peasant-base foundation of much of the economies of sub-Saharan Africa compels a better understanding of the basis of the prevailing developmental crisis of the continent as well as of the daunting nature of the pervasive

poverty of the majority of the population. It underscores the necessity to examine whether the “institutions in which the thinking of the majority of Africans finds expression” are compatible with the present aspirations for democratic governance and participation in a free market economy.

A first step in such an examination is to recognize the dominance and persistence of kinship relations as a major coordinating principle of socio-economic life in such a social formation. Kinship determined for the majority their access to all the critical factors of production, namely land, labor, capital and entrepreneurship. It governed access to productive land as well as to residential sites especially in the rural areas where the majority lived. It controlled access to labor of both family members and other kinsmen and women; whether in urban or rural areas, it facilitated access to capital and credit and determined what crafts or skills a person could acquire or what enterprise he could engage in. Given this emphasis on kinship, it is no wonder that there was in most sub-Saharan African countries no formal or organized market for each of these factors of production until very recently. Except in those areas where Europeans have settled in significant numbers, there are no effective markets even today for land and labour and, to some extent, for capital and entrepreneurship. Indeed, outside of these countries of eastern and southern Africa, the colonial attempts to institute formal land registries or labor exchanges have since fallen into disuse. The result is that these production factors, critical for economic progress, have remained largely untransformed, uncanceled and outside the main stream of economic aggregates in various African countries.

Kinship relationship as a coordinating principle of the pre-capitalist social formation is complemented by social values that are not easily aligned to the needs of a free market economy. On the ethical side, for instance, the values discount individual competitiveness and emphasize collective survival and cooperation. They ensure that no one is without access to the critical means of sustenance, notably land. This is fostered through an inheritance system (known as partible inheritance) whereby all the children or sons of a man on his death have a share of his movable and immovable property. On the philosophical side, the values regard life as a passage in which the living are no more than

the link between past and future generations. Consequently, with regard to societal resources such as land, the living are no more than trustees with rights only of beneficial use (or usufruct) but with no power to alienate the land out of the ownership of the family or the community at large. This philosophy not to alienate land to non-kinsmen was also bound up with notions of allegiance to one's community in an era of frequent communal hostilities.

Within such a social formation, apart from the kinship principle, the need for community-wide coordination and cooperation as well as some degree of group competition gave rise to the emergence of various institutions. Land tenure, for instance, or the institution defining ownership, access to and the use of land is perhaps one of the most critical institutions in African societies. The partible inheritance system and the absence of any major land-owning aristocracy over large parts of the sub-continent has meant the predominance of small, scattered and often intermixed holdings owned by lineages or sub-units of a lineage over which individuals can only claim a right of use rather than of ownership. With respect to age, one finds that in most African societies, successive cohorts within say, a three-year span are grouped together and regarded as age grades or age sets. Ottenberg (1960: 37) notes that “in addition to the integrative and regulatory functions of systems of age groupings for a society as a whole—such as social training, defense and government—they also have internal functions for their members irrespective of their relation to outside groups.”

Most communities are organized territorially to facilitate locational coordination and cooperation. Among rural communities, such organization may be a function of kinship or age sets in which individual spatial segments are occupied by households of members of one or more lineages or kinship units. In those groups with an urban tradition, the towns are organized into quarters or wards, each of which is also an amalgamation of lineages. Usually, each of these locational subdivisions has a leader or chief who is responsible to the traditional head of the whole community for the peace, order and environmental care of his area.

The impact of colonial attempts to integrate such social formations and their economies into the global capitalist economy was thus quite dramatic and is critical for appreciating the current configuration of urban

poverty in the region. Unlike pre-capital social formation, capitalism, as a coordinating principle, begins by requiring that all factors of production are transformed into, as it were, commodities with a price tag which can be brought to a self-regulating free market subject to the principles of supply and demand. But whilst the colonial administration worked hard to transform labor to commodity as wage labor, it was less that determine with respect to land. Indeed, the situation with respect to land is perhaps the most critical in appreciating the incompleteness of the integration and its significant contribution to urban poverty. Given the fact that in colonial times, the city was seen as essentially a European abode to which Africans were admitted on sufferance and, if possible, only temporarily, some differentiation emerged in most African countries between urban and rural land. Because of increasing mobility and the presence of migrants in cities seeking land on which to build residential accommodation, African societies had to embrace a new regime of land alienation or sales to non-indigenes. This regime, however, was only very active in urban and peri-urban areas as well as in those few areas where export agricultural crops became significant.

Notwithstanding this adaptive development, colonial administration in most countries preferred to ignore the trend or, as in the case of the Gambia, to pass the Land (Provinces) Act (1946) specifying that land occupied by Africans was to remain governed by customary tenure rules. In the Belgian colonial territories such as Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda, Africans were deliberately prevented from holding freehold or leasehold titles registrable under the Torrens Act. These were reserved only for Europeans (Riddell and Dickerman, 1986). Instead, urban land was declared state land, ostensibly leased from the state. Leases were for three-year periods, renewable twice for two-year periods on the basis of a document invented for that purpose, *livret de logeur*. In French-speaking colonial territories such as Burkina Faso, Congo and Mali, there was a similar contrivance known as *permis d'habitation* whilst in British colonial territories such as in Tanzania, Africans were simply offered *certificate of rights* and confined to particular sections of the city (Mabogunje, 1992a: 17).

Thus, instead of helping to promote these spontaneous adaptations of land transactions to the market economy, the colonial regime preferred to dampen

any such transformation. Indeed, it sought to leave land tenure beyond the areas of European settlement under what it called “customary” law, describing outside development toward the market as “informal” or “illegal”. Riddell and Dickerman (1986: viii) commented that the application of the word “customary” to the land tenure situation in most African countries is a measure of colonial derogatoriness since, “all law is predominantly customary; what is so often in the literature referred to as ‘modern’ law in Africa is merely the transplantation of a codified form of that which was once ‘customary’ law in European society. Africa is the only major research zone where development speaks of a continent-wide customary land tenure system. One does not hear, outside of theoretical Marxist writings, of an Asian customary tenure system. Neither do we speak of common pre-Colombia ...tenure of Latin America.”

In practical terms, therefore, what this means for most Africans is that when they migrate from rural to urban areas they are confronted by five major disjunctures, all of which act together to keep them in chronic urban poverty. First is the economic disjuncture arising from the change in the organizing principles of the economy, especially as it relates to land as a major factor of production. For most rural Africans, even today, land which is their major resource, still has only use value rather than exchange value because post-colonial governments have not seen fit to undertake appropriate land reform. When he migrates from the rural areas, the migrant comes with little or no capital as the productive land to which he earlier had only a right of use cannot be sold or exchanged to give him some capital with which to start his urban existence. He thus has no basis for relating to the financial and credit-providing institutions of the free market economy in the city. Each wave of migration pours into the city people with minimal resources or assets to engage in the challenges of socio-economic upward mobility. Even with the expansion of education into rural areas, the personal asset represented by educational attainment depends a great deal on the quality of rural education, individual innate capabilities and the extent to which nutritional factors have helped or hindered the ability to profit from such instructions. Thus, lack of assets remains a very major, though not insurmountable, factor in urban poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.

The economic disjuncture is compounded by the spatial disjuncture in which poor migrants quickly discover that location is equally an important cost variable of life in cities. Irrespective of what one gets to do in the city, the issue of whether this relates to location in central or peripheral areas becomes critical. Transportation cost is a daily expenditure item and soon determines where one seeks to eke out one's existence in the city. If in the blighted areas close to the city center, the poor immigrant soon discovers that with the high density of buildings, opportunities for securing additional income through urban agriculture is greatly constrained. These are options he could explore if he succeeded in locating in peri-urban areas although then he has to incur considerable transport costs if eventually the search for employment takes him to the inner city.

The third disjuncture is social and arises from the loss of the social networks and solidarity that used to buoy up the migrant in the rural area. There are no age-grades or craft organizations in the urban area to which he can readily relate. Although when he arrives in the city he is probably housed by a relation, he soon discovers that to find employment, he has little relevant skills and is not entitled to the types and range of benefits afforded to workers in a free market economy. He can only expect to secure employment through informal channels or, if he wants to acquire some skills, by being taken on as an apprentice in the informal economy. This economy provides no fringe benefits of transportation, accommodation or medical care and no safety net. This social disjuncture becomes more noticeable where issues of justice are concerned, for example, when evicted by a rapacious landlord. Access to the courts for civil or criminal matters is a formidable challenge and intensifies the feeling of voicelessness and powerlessness of the poor in the urban environment.

Thus, the social disjuncture is aggravated by the absence or breakdown of the family support system within the urban environment. Compound-type accommodation housing for an extended family of a man, his wives, his grown-up children and other male relations and their wives as well as all of their children cannot be maintained within the urban setting and has to be replaced with accommodation for the single adult or his nuclear family in rental rooming houses with non-related nuclear families. This means, for instance, that the collective responsibility for childcare or for the

care of the elderly characteristic of rural areas can no longer be expected within the urban setting. This disjuncture impacts differentially on family members. The husband is left almost on his own to fend for his family; the wife has to find some income-earning employment to augment family resources whilst having to look after the home and the children; the children usually suffer neglect in this process and some become caught up in crime and the network of street children; the elderly, especially if left without the care of family members, could end up in destitution or constrained to return to the village after many years of urban living.

Finally, there is the political disjuncture. There is no basis of representation of the type traditionally available through lineage, the kinship nexus, age grades, or through craft organization. Although there is a new basis of neighborhood or ward representation, this has very little significance for the poor who remain a tenant. In that situation, the poor are marginalized within the city and their political representation is at best through a web of clientelist participation by landlords in their neighborhoods (Barnes, 1986: 76). Because of the power, status, authority and leadership accrued to such landlords on the basis of their ownership of property, they come to be responsible for giving voice to the grievances and aspirations of disadvantaged urban poor. It is, of course, argued that this clientelist relationship in poor neighborhoods is strong because of the scarcity of information about the city's affairs or about how to deal with officials of the city's administration. However, with more widespread dissemination of information, as was attempted in the Advanced Locality Management Scheme (ALM) in Bombay, India, whole neighborhoods of the urban poor can be easily mobilized and empowered without strong effort at inclusive participatory strategy (Sivaramakrishnan, 2001: 17). Such mobilization, especially when promoted by non-governmental organizations on a sustained basis can mitigate the social exclusion and marginalization of the poor and reduce their sense of voicelessness and powerlessness.

Participatory urban governance has thus been put forward as an important strategy for dealing with urban poverty. Participation in the affairs of pre-industrial and pre-colonial African cities had always been mediated through age-grades, occupational guilds and especially ward, quarter, or neighborhood chiefs. In modern cit-

ies, the role of such spatial subdivisions of cities has been given very little importance in governance except tangentially in electoral politics. Yet, it is of interest that it was through the United Neighborhood Association of Porto Alegre in Brazil that the concept of “participatory budgeting” began to gain currency as a critical strategy for inclusiveness and empowerment in urban governance of ordinary citizens including the poor (Abers, 2001: 140).

CONTEXTUALIZING AFRICAN POVERTY REDUCTION ACTIVITIES

In developing a global research agenda, it is important to appreciate the African responses to the phenomenon of urban poverty even from colonial times. There is no doubt that Africans realized quite early the challenges of urban poverty as they moved in their millions into the cities of their colonial masters. They recognized what they could do to mitigate the situation and enhance the prospects of individuals for social and economic upward mobility within the emerging free market economy in their countries. Education was seen as central to the enhancement of individual prospects. Based on their loyalties to their primordial roots or hometowns, they came together collectively to do something about this. There were also other efforts to enhance individual prospects in the emerging city, building on age-long institutions such as the “rotating credit” system and other community-based solidarity organizations. Members of individual communities undertook these efforts on their own volition. Their achievements came to contrast sharply with what happened when Africans gained political access to state power.

One of the most significant institutions that Africans developed to tackle urban poverty especially during the colonial period was that of the “hometown” voluntary associations. Hometown Voluntary Associations or *associations d'originaires* as they are referred to in French-speaking African countries (Little, 1965: 26) have been, in many cities, not only the protectors of tradition but also agents of social development for their members. Honey and Okafor (1998: 147) observed that “arguably, the most important tradition upheld by hometown associations is identity: people’s core identity with their place of origin, an identity even more important than ethnic and national identity.” It is for this purpose that they have been instrumental in providing many

of these places with primary and secondary schools, health centers, roads, electricity, water supply, churches and mosques, town halls and so on. In this respect, they have been crucial in changing the attitude and worldview of community members both in their home base and in the cities to which they migrated.

Hometown voluntary associations (HTA) also provide social welfare and poverty mitigating functions for members in their cities of sojourn. Again, according to Honey and Okafor (1998: 13), the HTA welfare functions include both legal and financial assistance. The legal aid is generally for members harassed by law enforcement agencies or involved in litigation against non-members. The financial aid is for those having difficulty paying rent, children’s school fees, or for other emergency expenses. Financial assistance often takes the form of interest-free loans or grants. Other types of support include helping unemployed members secure jobs, homeless members find adequate housing, and ill members obtain medical care. HTAs are very important sources of support at the time of death in a family. In addition to covering a substantial part of the funeral cost, members provide solace to the bereaved. The HTA acts as a surrogate extended family, thus cushioning the trauma associated with such events.

Since political independence, however, the role of these institutions in assisting immigrants to the city to deal with problems of urban poverty has been considerably weakened. This is because post-colonial state claims that its major socio-economic task is to reduce the scourge of ignorance, disease and poverty. Yet, in spite of many years of post-independence rule by national leaders and the preparation of many national plans, it is difficult to assert that governments in African countries have really focused on reducing the scourge of poverty among their citizens. It is claimed that this is due largely to the corruption that permeates much of political life in most African countries. Indeed, compared with the achievements of hometown voluntary associations, most state-sponsored poverty reduction activities have been shrouded by a lack of transparency and accountability. The developmental dilemma and behavioral tensions arising from this duality of performance standards is well captured in Peter Ekeh’s (1975) concept of the “two publics” to which the average African has to respond. The first is a state-created “public” or civic realm that tends to be amoral,

where there is little transparency and accountability in transactions. The second is an historically-developed ‘primordial’ public of one’s community or ethnic group where trust and accountability are strongly articulated and valued. The result is an increasingly palpable distinction between the corruption and malfeasance that often surround the state realm and the relative probity and integrity that are found among those who choose to provide leadership in the “informal” or “community” realm. Removing or reducing this poignant dualism or parallelism especially in governance at the local level could be the beginning of a more people-centered, poverty-reducing and development-oriented administration in most African countries.

Another institution of trust that the poor in African cities had to use as a means of pulling themselves out of poverty is the “rotating credit” scheme. In a situation in which Africans cannot approach any modern financial institution because there has been no land reform and individuals have no collateral to secure their credit needs, the urban poor have resorted to this traditional method of providing themselves with credit to invest in activities to improve their conditions. There have been many variations on the “rotating credit” system, some operations evolving in quite impressive directions. Haggblade (1978), for instance, reports from Cameroon that this indigenous credit system was so successful in mobilizing large deposits that the risk of default was becoming a source of growing concern. Consequently, in 1975 the associations proceeded to register as a formal bank—the *Banque Unie de Credit*—thus becoming the sixth bank in the country. The success story, however, turned sour four years later (Miracle, Miracle, and Cohen, 1980) because the government, which saw the new institution as simply another opportunity for rent-seeking or reaping where it had not sowed, insisted on appointing the managing director of the bank. Rather than give up their autonomy and capacity for enforcing accountability, the association decided to close the bank and revert to their previous “informal” status.

Indeed, “informality” became the means whereby the poor were forced to respond to the challenges of urbanization in different countries especially with respect to housing. Using Sen’s distinction (Sen, 1981) between production-based and market-based entitlements, Amis (1987: 256) suggests that the housing situation for the poor in most African cities is the result of both possible

exchange entitlements and personal circumstances. Any form of renting and ownership, regardless of the finer points of the legal system, represents a market-based entitlement whilst self-building represents a production-based entitlement. This distinction between market-based and production-based entitlements provides a basis for coping with the considerable complexity of informal housing markets characterized by extensive illegal subletting within the officially defined categories of housing tenure. For the poorest, production-based entitlements had considerable advantages in that it gave them control over their houses and cost little in land and materials. The key problem with this housing entitlement, however, was the insecurity caused by periodic demolitions by the government. Since 1972, this threat has been kept in check in most countries as a result of the World Bank promotion of the idea of slum upgrading and various campaigns to provide the poor with secure tenure. The situation in the four major unauthorized shanty settlements around Nairobi, Dagoretti, Mathare Valley, Kibera and Korokocho, testify eloquently to this shift in the manner in which informal settlements of the poor are now being treated in many African countries.

Nonetheless, as already pointed out, the administrative neglect that is characteristic of these peripheral slum areas provides ideal conditions for the development of a clientelist relationship between landlords and tenants. Such relationships are, however, not always negative in their connotation. Indeed, as Barnes (1986: 78) noted, one of the major advantages of leadership in a clientelist situation is the ability to organize people to act collectively. Such ability often comes to the fore when communities have to provide themselves with services that municipal authorities are not able to offer. Such community participation is also increasingly being recognized as a way of guaranteeing the success of investment in service delivery. A number of studies are showing that when communities, including those living in unplanned, shanty-town and slum environments, are consulted about their service priorities, they are willing to not only pay for such services but also take good care of the investment through a heightened sense of ownership and commitment (UNCHS, 1996: 312). Usually, such community involvement in service provision is often mediated through non-governmental organizations. Women, in particular, are noted for playing an important

organizing role in such community efforts and are critical for mobilizing resources from individual households. For some services, awareness raising and capacity building for participation in the execution of the projects may be important preparatory activities. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that community participation in service provision does not always evolve into sustainable forms of service management since they are carried out in a non-formal manner, reacting to immediate needs with varying degrees of success.

More recently, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has revealed the inadequacy of leaving matters to community resolution. Although there is evidence that even among the urban poor, reproductive health services are being accessed in many African cities, the fertility rates of poor urban women are still not very different from those of rural women and are well above those of urban women in other regions. This means that the lower levels of fertility found in cities by comparison with rural areas and higher levels of contraceptive use may not be reliable indicators of the urban state of reproductive health services among the poor, even in the family planning dimension. Significant differences have also been noticed in fertility levels of small and large cities. Similarly, the HIV/AIDS seroprevalence rates are higher in the capital or major cities of most countries especially in eastern and southern Africa due largely to the fact that these are the destinations of many migration streams with more than average numbers living in conditions of chronic poverty.

Consequently, for most African countries, it is at the level of the informal shanty settlements that the incapacity of the municipal authorities is most obvious. In African countries, one has to recognize the problems of not only the urban poor but also poor municipal authorities or local governments. Most municipal authorities will agree that they have a special role in ensuring that all residents within their jurisdictions including the urban poor are well serviced, that the quality of the services provided meet appropriate standards, that they monitor and supervise the supply of these services and plan for their sustainable growth. But to live up to all of these responsibilities, they are expected to mobilize ample financial resources. However, for many reasons not unconnected to corruption and the lack of transparency, most of them have not been able to mobilize internal financial resources from their citizens

through taxes, rates and fees and have had to concentrate only on statutory subventions from higher levels of government. This, of course, impairs their capacity to effectively promote local economic development and inhibits them from being able to deliver much needed services to their citizens especially the poor.

ARTICULATING AN URBAN POVERTY RESEARCH AGENDA

From the above, it is clear that articulating an urban poverty research agenda especially for the Africa region must take into consideration quite a complex set of facts. Apart from such well-known areas as investigating the impact of macro-economic and sectoral policies as well as price movements on urban poverty, this presentation has indicated that within the African context various other “informal” strategies of the poor for mitigating the scourge of poverty and in some cases providing a path out of it need to be given more serious attention in a global research agenda.

In trying to articulate a global research agenda, the basic questions relate not only to the incidence of urban poverty but also to the circumstances which make it such that some individuals could get out of it even if only relatively whilst some others remain chronically caught within its web. Five areas of such research would appear to be indicated. These are: assessing the magnitude of urban poverty; examining its differential impact on various members of households particularly the vulnerable—children, women, and the elderly; considering the structural factors that affect the severity of urban poverty; examining the functional factors determining the coping ability of the urban poor; and evaluating the capacity of the state and of international donor agencies for effectively intervening in reducing the severity and scope of urban poverty.

On the issue of the magnitude of the urban poor in African cities, the World Bank indicated that as of 1998, there were 291 million persons (or 46.3 percent of the total population) both in urban and rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa living on less than US\$1.00 per day. Although it did not indicate what proportion of this total was urban, the increasing rate of urbanization on the continent and the fact that most migrants to cities tend to come into a somewhat weakened income-earning position, lead one to assume that urban centers will account for more than its due proportion of poor.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the proportion of the urban poor determined on this basis may be an underestimation. Such a position, however, needs not be taken on its face value. There is indeed much that global research still needs to do to authenticate the validity of the US\$1.00 per day as a realistic basis for identifying the poor in a context in which the low-income and the poor in most of Africa do not accurately declare their earnings or depend solely on cash income for their subsistence. Instructive in this regard is the wide margin of error in the MTN telecommunications calculations of the effective market for its product, based on the fact that 70 per cent of Nigerians were said to live below the US\$1.00 per day poverty line.

Moreover, the multi-faceted nature of urban poverty has encouraged attempts at other more comprehensive indicators of urban poverty such as the standard of living/welfare measure. Part of the issue of measurement is to be able, among other things, to distinguish between chronic and transitory urban poverty. These measures place the unit of estimation of poverty at the household rather than the individual level and use for analysis real total household expenditure per adult-equivalent (Kedir, 2005: 46). They, of course, have to be adjusted for price changes over time to differentiate the effects between households in chronic and transitory poverty.

Of increasing significance, however, is the decomposing of individual households to identify the differential impact of poverty on its vulnerable members on the basis of age and sex. The children are perhaps the most obvious cases in the sense that where poverty impacts directly on their access to educational, health and nutritional opportunities, it may permanently damage their ability to work themselves out of poverty. Where the problem is compounded by family crisis or break-up, then the phenomenon of street-children becomes of challenging significance. Many studies have already been undertaken on these issues as well as on the mortality or morbidity effect of the slum environment especially on children below the age of 5. The effect of food insecurity and nutritional deficiency on the ability of children to take advantage of free access to education still needs to be seriously researched. Where it appears that childhood deprivation seriously impairs learning ability, it may be that this is an equally important factor in the difficulties of escaping chronic poverty in adulthood. Longitudinal studies of members of individual

households thus become a critical element in global urban poverty research. To this must be added problems of child preference and the effect this may have on the life chances of girls from poor homes.

With regard to women, distinction must be made between those who are simply members of a poor household whether as wife or daughter and those who head households either due to divorce, widowhood or loss of parents. For the former, the prospect of participating in informal economic activities either as apprentice, help-maid or entrepreneur is often the available choice. The returns from these efforts are, however, not often considerable and often drive them to use sex for income earning whilst exposing themselves to increased risks from the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For young female adults who have to head households as a result of the death of their parents through the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the problem becomes even more daunting. The severity of the exposure of women to poverty can depend on the solidarity network within which they operate in the city that, in turn, deserves some research attention. Investigating the multiple stresses impacting poor women, especially heads of households in urban areas, could increase our understanding of the effects of the failure of municipal authorities in providing adequate infrastructure and social services.

The problem of the elderly is even more intimidating. In the absence of any real safety net, it is not clear how the elderly urban poor survive in the city aside from slipping into destitution. It would be interesting to examine whether any social network is built or whether, as is generally surmised, most migrants to the city return to their rural base as they get older and need more intimate care from members of their extended family.

But it is the structural factors affecting the severity of urban poverty that need greater research attention. Of these, I believe, the situation with respect to the present status of land reform and land registration in most African countries deserves serious attention. Because in their rural residence many Africans migrating to cities are not totally without claims to landed assets, the circumstances in which they come to the city with little or nothing to show for these proprietary claims deserves investigation. It may be that such studies provoke African governments to give serious attention to the need for land reform to enhance the economic capabilities not only of their rural citizens but also of those who

choose to migrate to the city. In an era when the international community is canvassing for the sway of the free market economy and globalization underscores that this is crucial for nations to maintain their competitive position in the global economy, such economic empowerment can only enhance the development of most African countries and reduce the scourge of poverty among their populations.

Of equal importance is the study of the various institutions developed by migrants to the city to enhance their capacity to struggle out of poverty. The role of hometown voluntary associations is starting to receive greater attention. There are many examples of such “institutional radicalization” by civil society in many countries that scholars need to study more closely to advance the realization of their full developmental potential (Mabogunje 1991, 1992b). This is particularly important for international donor agencies that are beginning to recognize the need to assist local institutions if the impact of their assistance at poverty reduction is to be felt. Along with such radicalized institutions must go community-based organizations, a number of which are starting to emerge. We need to investigate what institutions of trust within communities serve to guarantee and sustain efforts at poverty reduction in different countries.

One of the most interesting examples of such efforts in which I have been personally involved is the Ijebu-Ode Development Board for Poverty Reduction. The Board was the product of a city consultation strategy sponsored by the UN-Habitat in Nairobi through the locally based Development Policy Centre in Ibadan that involved all stakeholders in the poverty reduction effort of the community in a three-day workshop. The community elected members of the Board, used its traditional organization to raise the initial capital for the Board to operate, and engaged in various training programs that are then backed up by micro-finance lending to participants in the program. The program involved local government personnel but the stakeholders did not have confidence in the ability of their leadership to manage such an organization on a long-term sustainable basis. The operation has been ongoing since 1999 and won the 2002 Dubai Prize for best practice in poverty reduction. Ijebu-Ode is, however, a relatively small town of about 200,000 inhabitants. Its traditional ruler took a very committed interest in

the activities of the Board. The age-grades and various community associations were all involved in raising the initial capital whilst distinguished but retired citizens provided seasoned management for the program. How the situation will play out in large metropolitan centers will, therefore, need to be researched. How these structural factors affect the ability of the poor to access needed services within the urban environment will also need to be studied.

The functional factors determining the coping ability of the urban poor relate to their livelihood strategies for surviving in the city. The opportunities for being employed or for engaging in self-employment or for doing the two together require more detailed investigation than usual studies where all the poor are put together under the rubric of informal sector operators. Outside of the general demand for unskilled labor, the poor have to be able to show competence and dedication to be able to earn income and keep the employment over time. It would be useful to investigate what opportunities exist in cities especially for adult migrants, male and female, for enhancing their competence and capabilities and what constrains their ability to benefit from these opportunities other than morbidity and economic slow-down. Cost of transportation to work is a major factor in the ability to hold down a job. It will be necessary to examine how the factor of mobility enhances or inhibits the ability of the poor to cope with or to emerge out of poverty.

With respect to self-employment, investigation should be undertaken into the factors affecting the access of the urban poor to land for urban agriculture, to micro-finance and credit for engaging in profitable market activities, to various public services and infrastructural facilities needed for production, such as water and energy, and to improve his shanty accommodation. Given the fact that the poor cannot have direct access to any of these services, it is important to examine the nature of the network that makes such access possible whether through a clientelist relationship or some form of association and determine what personal elements exclude certain categories of the poor from being able to tap into any of these relationships.

The issue of the voicelessness and powerlessness of the urban poor must also receive serious attention. Apart from investigating various strategies for mitigating violent crimes and youthful delinquencies in poor

neighborhoods, it would be interesting to evaluate innovative strategies for enhancing access of the poor to justice at minimal cost and with less intimidating rituals, protocols and paraphernalia as found in the conventional court system. Experiments such as the Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism that has been practiced for some time in Latin America (Dakolias, 1996) and is being canvassed in a number of African countries need to be evaluated to establish how well they serve the needs of the poor (McClymont & Golub, 2000). It will also be necessary to investigate how far so-called “customary courts” which were set up in many African countries soon after political independence continue to provide accessible adjudication services for the urban poor.

As already indicated, a critical element in the incidence of poverty in most African cities is the poverty of the municipal authorities themselves. Except for those that have preserved much of their colonial administrative structure, most urban local governments have been delinquent with respect to resource mobilization and financial management. The problem is further compounded by the reluctance of many central governments to effectively decentralize and devolve power to local authorities. The argument is that this level of government is generally incompetent and is unlikely to be able to hire and retain personnel at the level necessary to enhance their ability to deal with the problem of poverty. Central to such ability is the provision of infrastructural facilities and services to cover all neighborhoods within their jurisdiction including those peri-urban areas occupied by the poor. Being disempowered themselves, many urban local authorities, especially those of metropolitan centers, are unable to respond effectively and innovatively to the challenges posed by urban poverty and the poor urban environment of slums and shanty settlements. It will be necessary to research what strategies can enhance the capacities of government at this level to effectively and efficiently perform its functions of service delivery especially to the urban poor.

One of the major reasons for the incapacity of local governments in most African cities is poor information. According to UN-HABITAT (2003: 46), “most cities in the developing world [but particularly in Africa] are suffering from an information crisis, which is seriously undermining their capacity to develop and analyze effective urban policy. They do not have sustained

or systematic appraisal of urban problems and little appreciation of what their own remedial policies and programs are in fact achieving.” More seriously, the lack of needed data means that most cities have no firm basis on which to plan the service needs of their communities or to estimate the financial resources that can be mobilized to be able to provide these services. Strange as it may sound, it is true that in many African cities houses are not numbered, streets are not named and neighborhoods or wards are hardly defined. In some cities, all these are there but in an indifferent or unsystematic fashion that is usually not updated with the growth of new neighborhoods and residential districts.

Indeed, very few African cities pay much attention to their neighborhood structure as distinct from their electoral wards. The absence of maps showing the neighborhoods of most cities makes it difficult to appreciate the unequal distribution of amenities and services and therefore weakens the likelihood of agitation for empowerment to redress such inequalities. When in 1986, Ngom and his team undertook the mapping of neighborhoods (official *quartiers*) in Dakar, Senegal, and provided a complete inventory of public infrastructure, they were surprised at the significant gaps they found between service levels in the different neighborhoods. What the mapping revealed, according to Ngom (1989: 202), was that “the investment policy regarding the services studied does not follow a particularly rational planning strategy; on the contrary, it is subject to a kind of anarchy dominated by those with investment capability (politicians and donor agencies).” Not unexpectedly, the work attracted the attention of the local and administrative authorities, (the Urban Community of Dakar, the Ministry of the Interior, and the National Census Office) as well as other researchers who all became engaged in finding strategies to reduce such gross inequities. By the same token, Glockner et al. (2004: 187) argues that community mapping showing the layout of houses and lanes, the boundaries of neighborhoods, location of permanent or temporary facilities, infrastructural amenities and land uses constitutes “a technique that has been applied successfully in a number of urban communities in Asia and Africa.....in development planning and, more recently has become a key tool for community mobilization and empowerment.”

A serious attempt to deal with the problem of urban poverty may, therefore, have to begin by improving on

the data base on which the cities depend for the delivery of services. Indeed, this may entail identifying the number of blighted areas of the city occupied by the poor as well as the number of houses and households within such areas. Improved data base, using such information technological facilities as aerial photographs, satellite imageries, geographic information systems (GIS) and global positioning systems (GPS), also makes it easier for local government or municipal authorities to become a lot more transparent and accountable. These are areas where both the central government and international donor agencies can provide local governments and municipal authorities much needed technical and research assistance. Indeed, Satterthwaite (2001: 147) argues that “the two most important long-term processes for reducing urban poverty [are] supporting the development of accountable, effective city and municipal local governments, and supporting the organizations formed by lower-income groups.”

CONCLUSION

The Millennium Development Goals agreed upon by heads of state in the United Nations defined eight major goals that are meant to impact dramatically the incidence of poverty in most countries. Taking its starting points from 1990, these goals are meant to be achieved in most countries by the year 2015. Given the primacy the international community places on the issue of poverty eradication, it is understandable that the first of the goals was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger through halving the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day in every country. The other goals of achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, empowering women and reducing child mortality can hardly be met without positively impacting the status of the urban poor. More direct in their anti-poverty thrust are the goals of combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; halving the proportion of people without access to potable water; and significantly improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Although reports indicate that many countries in Asia and Latin America have shown significant progress in moving towards these goals, the position in sub-Saharan Africa has been less than satisfactory. It is clear that governments in many African countries have not been able to come up with the appropriate leverage to impact

significantly the lives of most of their urban poor. Indeed, it has been claimed that “overall, Africa as a whole is falling behind the rest of the world in the prevention of poverty, and in some respects the problem is getting worse, but indicators point in different directions. The proportion of global poverty attributable to Africa is rising and the likelihood is that this will continue unless there are radical changes to policies and performance.” (World Bank, 2001: 8–9).

Clearly, there is a lot that still needs to be investigated and understood about the structural complexities within which poverty operates in African cities. The Wilson Center’s effort to develop a Global Research Agenda on Urban Poverty cannot have come at a more opportune time for most countries of Africa. Although the NEPAD document agreed to by African leaders recognizes that the challenge for Africa is to develop the capacity to sustain growth at levels required to achieve poverty reduction and sustainable development, the focus of attention has been unabashedly on sustainable development. As far as poverty reduction or eradication is concerned, the major strategies advocated are to work with multilateral organizations to accelerate implementation and adoption of their poverty reduction approaches, set up a gender task team to ensure that the specific issues faced by poor women are addressed in poverty reduction strategies and a task team to accelerate the adoption of participatory and decentralized processes for the provision of infrastructural and social services (NEPAD, 2001). The document also stresses the joint responsibility of African leaders to “promote community and user involvement in infrastructure construction, maintenance and management especially in poor urban and rural areas.” These commitments of African governments, indirect as they may be, provide sufficient leverage for promoting greater devolution of power to local governments and major changes in institutional settings for enhancing their capacity to provide basic services to all citizens including the poor. The hope is that this Global Research Agenda on Urban Poverty when completed will provide much needed new information and greater understanding as to how these ideas and efforts can result in the expected outcome of significant poverty reduction in cities of sub-Saharan Africa.

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