

Helpdesk Research Report: 'Voices of the Poor' in Southern Africa

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Query: Have there been any recent regional 'voices of the poor' type studies for Southern Africa (SADC region)? If not, please review national literature. What are poor people themselves saying about poverty? Are there commonalities across and within the region?

Enquirer: DFID.

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1. Overview

No recent 'voices of the poor' type studies for the SADC (Southern African Development Community) region have been identified during the 2 days of internet research allowed for this query. Additionally, none of the experts who contributed to the research knew of such a report or of similar research projects currently underway. Several Africa-wide studies published by Afrobarometer, which include information on multiple countries from the SADC region, have been included in the list of resources below. Additionally, country studies focusing on South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia have also been included. Material focusing on other SADC countries was specifically searched for, but was not found during the research.

It is difficult to draw regional conclusions from the resources below. There is not enough material, and the research that has been done is not co-ordinated or comprehensive enough to be able to draw out reliable cross-country findings. However, we can tentatively note that the following points are mentioned in multiple resources:

- The poor view poverty as multi-faceted. Poverty is about more than just income. It also incorporates education, social status and access to institutional support.
- The poor feel that there are structural causes of poverty and general institutional obstacles to overcoming poverty.
- Agriculture and land-related concerns feature highly amongst the concerns of the poor.

2. Regional studies

Afrobarometer, 2009, 'Poverty Reduction, Economic Growth and Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa', Briefing paper no. 68, Afrobarometer:

http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfrobriefNo68_21may09_newfinal.pdf

This paper presents findings from public attitude surveys in 2008 in 19 sub-Saharan African countries. The authors use the concept of 'lived poverty' to assess how general economic

growth across Africa prior to 2008 has impacted on the everyday lives of ordinary Africans. Respondents were asked to assess how frequently they go without basic necessities. The most commonly reported shortage was of a cash income, then medical care, food, clean water and cooking fuel, in that order. The findings show considerable cross-national variation. Zimbabwe gives the worst score, although this was using 2005 data as a new survey was not possible in 2008.

The scores for 10 countries are compared with earlier surveys. The paper argues that in the period 2000-08 'lived poverty' has generally decreased but there are wide country variations. There were decreases in 'lived poverty' (i.e. improvements) in Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia. The situation remained unchanged in Mali and Tanzania and there were increases in 'lived poverty' in Botswana, Nigerian and Zimbabwe. Changes in 'lived poverty' are found to be linked to both economic growth and to political freedom.

Graham, C. and Hoover, M., 2007, 'Optimism and Poverty in Africa: Adaption or a Means to Survival?' Afrobarometer working paper no. 76:

<http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo76.pdf>

The authors find unexpectedly high levels of optimism among the poorest and most insecure respondents to surveys in 11 African countries (including Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Malawi, Namibia and Tanzania). This is a departure from other regions where optimism is positively correlated with wealth, education, and other signs of prosperity. The poorest respondents were the most optimistic about their children's future social and economic mobility. The paper also finds that the poor's optimism is positively correlated with preference for democracy but not with preference for markets. The authors tentatively conclude that optimism may be a necessary or at least helpful trait for survival among the very poor in such adverse circumstances.

Bratton, M., 2007, 'Are You Being Served? Popular Satisfaction with Health and Education Services in Africa', Working paper no. 65, Afrobarometer:

<http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo65.pdf>

This paper surveys public opinion, rather than specifically soliciting the views of the poor. However, some of the findings are disaggregated providing some specific information on poor people's views. In particular, the paper finds that poor people enjoy less access to services and feel less service satisfaction than wealthier people. Poor people require not only affordable social services but specially targeted programmes, for example programmes targeted at the healthcare needs of poor women. The user-friendliness of services is important to all, but of particular importance to poorer clients.

Bratton, M., 2006, 'Poor People and Democratic Citizenship in Africa', Working Paper no.56, Afrobarometer:

<http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo56.pdf>

This paper explores poor people's views on democratic citizenship in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Bratton finds that poor people in Africa are clearly dissatisfied with the quality of governance provided by elected national leaders, but they prefer to by-pass formal democratic channels in favour of informal relations of patron-clientelism. This was particularly the case for the older rural poor.

The paper concludes that poverty is neutral for attachments to democratic values – people at all income levels tend to have similar views on political tolerance, political accountability and political equality. Secondly, there is a clear absence of an anti-democratic constituency among the African poor. In fact, voter turnout is more frequent among poor people and

poverty has a positive correlation with popular political activity between elections e.g. attendance at community meetings. However, Bratton questions whether the poor exercise their political rights as empowered citizens or as 'impoverished supplicants'. Respondents were asked to choose which statement most reflected their political views:

- a) People are like children, the government should take care of them like a parent
- b) Government is an employee; the people should be the bosses who control the government.

A majority chose a) – 58% versus 36% who opted for b).

Razafindrakoto, M. and Rouband, F., 2007, 'Corruption, Institutional Discredit, and Exclusion of the Poor: A Poverty Trap', Working paper no. 86, Afrobarometer:
<http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo86.pdf>

The authors use household surveys in 18 countries in SSA to show that the poor are as sensitive to corruption as other groups and that they are more often victims of corruption in their routine dealings with state administration and public services. The poorest groups tend to become discouraged and give in to corruption more easily. Consequently, they lose interest in politics and can even become politically disaffected altogether. This further diminishes their already limited capacity to make their voices heard in decision-making processes.

2. Country studies

South Africa

Dauids, Y. D., 2009, 'Impact of Perceptions of Poverty on the Well-Being of South Africans', Paper presented at the IX ISQOLS Conference on Quality of Life, Florence, Italy, 19-23rd July:
http://www.hsrc.ac.za/research/output/outputDocuments/6003_Dauids_Impactofperceptions.pdf

This study shows that more than half of the South African population lacks access to basic necessities and that most people, the poor in particular, perceive poverty in structural dimensions rather than individualistic dimensions. The study concludes that lack of basic necessities forces poor people (black Africans in particular) to live lives far below what is acceptable in contemporary South Africa. The poor are typically viewed as lacking motivation to succeed or break the poverty cycle. The disadvantages experienced by the poor, as well as the negative connotations attached to being poor, create feelings of marginalization, victimization and social exclusion.

Smit, W., 2007, 'Voices of the Poor – Making Urban Land Markets Work for the Poor: Synthesis and Recommendations', report produced for Urban Landmark by the Development Action Group
See attached file named 'Smit 2007'.

This is a report of various workshops held throughout South Africa in 2007. The workshops aimed to facilitate discussion amongst community based groups on the issue of access to urban land for the poor. A wide range of issues were identified as obstacles to access, and poverty was identified as the primary impediment. Groups also argued that poor people had insufficient access to finance in order to purchase land, and were unable to pay fees and

charges even if they could secure a property at a very low price. Other obstacles preventing the poor from accessing urban land included:

- South Africa's colonial and apartheid history
- Existence of a property market where land prices are set at high levels
- Government policies or implementation of policies are seen as not pro-poor
- Corruption
- Party politics and the self-interest of councillors
- Lack of participation by communities
- Lack of information
- Weak state of civil society

The paper also makes recommendations and discusses policy implications.

Wright, G., Noble, M. and Magasela, W., 2008, 'Towards a Democratic Definition of Poverty: Socially Perceived Necessities in South Africa', HSRC Press:

http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/product.php?cat=20&sort=orderby&sort_direction=&productid=2224&freedownload=1

This paper presents findings from HSRC's 2005 South African Social Attitudes Survey, designed by the University of Oxford's Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy. Respondents were asked to select from a list which items, services and activities they regard as essential for all people to have or be able to access/do in order to enjoy an acceptable standard of living in present-day South Africa. The findings show a striking level of agreement between different groups regarding the necessities, resulting in a 'democratically derived' definition of poverty. As well as sufficient food and clothing, an acceptable standard of living is defined as the following:

- Adequate care for the sick
- Decent and secure housing
- Ability to provide for children
- A decent neighbourhood
- Supportive social relationships and religious networks
- Resources to deal with emergency situations

Most of the paper deals with the opinions of South Africans who are not poor. However, the findings chapter disaggregates findings by groups, and page 17 and 18 compare responses from people above and below the poverty line.

Zambia

IDS, 2009, 'Voices of the Poor in the Current Crises', Issue 7, Policy Responses to the Global Financial Crisis, Institute of Development Studies:

Available for purchase from www.ids.ac.uk

This short briefing paper includes participatory evidence from poor communities in Zambia, amongst other countries. Essentially the paper argues that poor communities in various developing countries are suffering as a result of high food and fuel prices and the effects of the global financial crisis are starting to be felt on the ground. In relation to Zambia in particular, the report notes that:

- Farmers are finding that high fertiliser and diesel costs are constraining production.
- There are unconfirmed reports of a rise in child prostitution as a coping strategy.
- Poor people feel that community and church-based support is declining.

Tanzania

Kadigi, R., Mdoe, N. and Ashimogo, G., 2007, 'Understanding Poverty Through the Eyes of the Poor: The Case of Usangu Plains in Tanzania', *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth* vol. 32, p.1330-1338:

Available for purchase from www.sciencedirect.com

This paper results from a participatory poverty assessment (PPA) carried out in Tanzania between 2002-05. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in wealth ranking and livelihoods analysis. The paper finds that when the poor are asked what poverty means, they highlight a range of aspects rather than just focusing on income-related issues. For example, intangible assets such as social status and education level were highlighted. The abstract summarises the analysis as showing "an array of poverty indicators differing from one locality to another. However, the 'access to land with moderate slopes and water for irrigation' ranked as the most important indicator. In addition, rice production was perceived as one of the key factors that lift a household from a lower to a higher level of well-being. A person who harvests adequate rice was perceived as having almost everything such as money, food, can build a good house and has social status in the community. The poor households harvest little rice because they cultivate little land using mostly their own family labour and they have, therefore, problems in securing their daily meal. Other indicators included the possession of livestock, education level, membership of local societies and associations, as well as the ability to pay for health services. The quantitative analysis for the subset of the 'poor' households showed lower direct dependency on water related activities compared to other households. This illustrated the impact of reduced access of poorer households to natural resources (water and land resources in particular), which force them to rely more on other sources of income, and mainly on sale of labour."

IOB, 2004, 'Poverty Policies and Perceptions in Tanzania: An Evaluation of Dutch Aid to two District Rural Development Programmes', Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

<http://www.euforic.org/iob/docs/200409071439567376.pdf?&username=guest@euforic.org&password=9999&groups=IOB&&username=staff1@euforic.org&password=58540277763b869418f21acf5d88656b&groups=IOB&&username=staff1@euforic.org&password=4e05eeca33cbb4723c53b96210ac4cc4&groups=IOB>

This report evaluates the support of the Netherlands to the District Rural Development Programmes (DRDP) in Tanzania, which generally finds that it has not delivered significant, tangible results in the area of poverty alleviation. The evaluation seeks to judge the programme from the perspectives of various stakeholders, including the intended beneficiaries. The perceptions of poor rural villagers of the effectiveness of the programmes are presented in the report, giving interesting information on their views on poverty. Page 17 summarises these views: "In the perception of the villagers, those projects aimed at improving social services and physical infrastructure were relevant for poverty alleviation. In their opinion, however, the DRDP did not address their crucial problems: the lack of an enabling environment to increase agricultural production and to market their produce at fair prices. The population did not perceive the basic causes of poverty in terms of income, but rather in the socio-political conditions that influenced production, income and welfare: access to and control over land, the quality and reliability of support services for agricultural production and animal husbandry (input supply, marketing, veterinary services), the lack of social security due to the absence of employment opportunities, and weaknesses in leadership and the legal system" (pdf page 17, article page 3). Despite participatory planning of the DRDP, villagers saw it as a bureaucratic, technical exercise that was dominated by government officials.

Ellis, F. and Mdoe, N., 2003, 'Livelihoods and Rural Poverty Reduction in Tanzania', *World Development* vol. 31, no. 8, pp.1367-1384.

Available for purchase from www.sciencedirect.com

This paper uses research from 10 sub-villages in the Morogoro region to explore the capacity of the PRSP to deliver on poverty reduction in rural areas. The abstract comments that 'research findings show that rural poverty is strongly associated with lack of land and livestock, as well as an inability to secure nonfarm alternatives to diminishing farm opportunities. The rural poor encounter a public sector institutional context that is neutral or blocking rather than enabling for them to construct their own pathways out of poverty.'

Section c on page 1379 is the most relevant to this query. The authors specifically identify the following points raised by villagers during their qualitative research:

- Land rights and ownership are a particular issue of concern, especially for women. Traditional systems were seen as being strained due to increasing scarcity of available land and the presence of commercial landowners pushing for cash sales.
- Local traditional systems are seen as satisfactory for resolving civil issues, although they were infrequently mentioned as playing a strong developmental role.
- Views on public services were either mixed or negative.
- Taxation is seen as a critical issue.
- People had positive experiences of direct assistance from donors and NGOs.
- Rural citizens are hindered by "the legacy of the past in the form of generally obstructive public agency responses to business, trade and exchange [which] lingers on for most rural citizens. A small minority of individuals with the requisite personal networks and contacts in the local or national public sector are able to avoid or rise above the legal or informal restrictions with which most rural citizens must comply" (p.1380).

Additional information

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Websites visited

Google, Google Scholar, GSDRC, SARP, World Bank, IDS, Afrobarometer, Science Direct, Ingentaconnect, Mass Public Opinion Institute, Oxford Policy Management, Democracy in Africa Research Unit, University of Cape Town, Rural Poverty Portal and various academic journals.

About Helpdesk research reports: Helpdesk reports are based on 2 days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues; and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.

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