

## **The undeserving poor**

# **Poverty, provision and politics in the poorest nodes of South Africa**

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper attempts to explain how, in just 14 years, the poor moved from central to post-apartheid reconstruction and development to being depicted by political leaders as the undeserving poor. The undeserving poor – relying on ‘handouts’ and ‘dependent’ on the state, lacking the moral fibre to enjoy the benefits of economic growth – have come to occupy a significant place in the poverty discourse and policy formulation of the African National Congress (ANC). Quite remarkably, this contrasts with the continued public sympathy for the poor and the large amount of social giving occurring in South Africa.

To try and tell this story, the paper tries to cover a number of issues. It begins by analysing the thinking about poverty and the poor of English intellectuals and politicians in late-Victorian and Edwardian England, where the massive urban slums first spawned the study and measurement of poverty, out of which came the famous ‘two nations’ thesis of Disraeli, a recurrent theme of Thabo Mbeki and his government. As newly democratising countries grappling with the ‘revolutionary threat and humanitarian disgrace’ of poverty, the comparison reveals some interesting differences in approach between England then and South Africa now. The English social explorers who described the lives of the urban poor, generated increasing sympathy for and understanding of poverty and its effect on the poor. Public sympathy remains strongly evident in South Africa – but appears to be drying up in official circles.

The paper then offers a brief analysis of ANC discourse around the poor and anti-poverty interventions; what the ANC says, government has to try and do. But the heterogeneity of the ANC, a self-styled ‘broad church’, is directly implicated in its failure adequately to conceptualise and attack poverty. ANC discourse is marked by an incessant non-specificity and reliance on declamatory terms such as ‘the poorest of the poor’, accompanied by a proliferation of target groups that morph from party to state. Fourteen years into democracy, South Africa lacks an anti-poverty strategy, targets, or target groups.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Ross Jennings for his statistical and programming mastery, to Karuti Kanyinga, Matthew Smith and Hein Marais for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper; and to participants at the Africanist conference for their comments.

<sup>2</sup> Targeting is a critical function of any programmatic intervention, and is used in that sense, rather than with the ideological overtones analysed in Mkandawire T (nd) ‘Targeting and universalism in developing countries’ (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, mimeo).

To ground the discussion, the paper uses data from the first baseline survey of the 21 poor 'nodes' in South Africa which make up the Urban Renewal and Integrated Sustainable Rural Development programmes. The purpose is to try and understand and describe 'the poors' – what kind of people they are, with what kinds of attitudes and needs – and how (un)deserving they really are. Some basic multivariate analysis suggests useful techniques that the ANC and/or government could follow in better identifying and targeting people living in deep poverty, in place of the 'spray and pray' approach currently in use.

## **Two nations**

In nineteenth century England, as the urban proletariat mushroomed to meet the labour demands of the industrial revolution, fed by continual rural-to-urban migration, people were herded into slums, suffered appalling work and living conditions, and lived lives of brutal brevity and harshness. Their condition was hidden away from those who chose not to see, until a series of 'social explorers' – the domestic versions of Livingstone, Stanley and others – began to investigate the living and working conditions of the poor, whose lives also began to populate popular fiction, most obviously the novels of Charles Dickens.

The study and measurement of poverty – now a worldwide industry – had its origins in late-Victorian and Edwardian England. From Charles Booth's 1887 *Condition and Occupations of the people of The Tower Hamlets 1886-7* and Rowntree's *Poverty: A study of town life* there is a direct line to the professional sociologist of today, both qualitative and quantitative.

Some social explorers were moved by professional curiosity, others by moral concerns. For example, the Salvation Army was launched by William Booth, following his investigating poverty in inner London. Others, such as Marx and Engels, were fired by more overtly political concerns, as they witnessed what they believed were the forces of history disrobed and made evident by sharpened class conflicts. As they wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, previous epochs had been confused by "a manifold gradation of social rank". But things changed with the industrial age, "the epoch of the bourgeoisie", which had "this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms". "Society", they famously argued,

*...is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.*<sup>3</sup>

This fear of the revolutionary potential of the urban working class was widely shared, if less widely celebrated. But there was agreement that

*...the modern labourer instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his class.*<sup>4</sup>

Seebom Rowntree, son of chocolate manufacturer Joseph, was the first to develop and write about poverty lines and poverty cycles, in the very early 1900s. He marked the move from impassioned crusader leading the reader through dramatic, secret urban jungles, to that of cool judgement, graphs and statistical analysis; from (passionate) qualitative to (reserved, academic) quantitative methods of analysing poverty.<sup>5</sup> This latter style has come to dominate poverty studies world-wide. But distance has replaced the proximity won by many social explorers who disguised themselves and lived in the slums they studied, sometimes for a year or more.<sup>6</sup> Modern poverty analysts rely on survey data, and proximity is commonly gained only through the viewing glass of a focus group facility.

The key Victorian social problem acutely mirrors that of South Africa today, namely the perception that society was (as Marx and Engels gleefully reported) falling into two hostile camps. Industrialisation had created sub-cultures in which some saw "a really revolutionary class"<sup>7</sup> while others saw humans reduced to bestiality. "Immorality", Andrew Mearns wrote in an anonymous penny pamphlet, "is but the natural outcome of conditions like these... Incest is common; and no form of vice or sensuality causes surprise or attracts attention", and people lived like animals, in "pestilential human rookeries":

*To get into them you have to penetrate courts reeking with poisonous and malodorous gases arising from accumulations of sewage and refuse flowing beneath your feet; courts, many of them which the sun never penetrates, which are never visited by a breath of fresh*

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<sup>3</sup> Marx K. and Engels F. (1967 edition) *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth, Penguin), p.80.

<sup>4</sup> Keating (ed.) (1981) *Into unknown England 1866-1913: Selections from the social explorers* (Fontana, Glasgow), p.93.

<sup>5</sup> The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust makes grants to civil society organisations working for the poor in South Africa.

<sup>6</sup> See Keating *The social explorers op cit.*, 'Introduction'

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

*air, and which rarely know the virtues of a drop of cleansing water. You have to ascend rotten staircases ... You have to grope your way along dark and filthy passages swarming with vermin. Then, if you are not driven back by the intolerable stench, you may gain admittance to the dens in which these thousands of beings ... herd together.*<sup>8</sup>

The language reflected the bestial reality facing the social explorer, who found room after room full of horrors – “a father, mother, three children and four pigs!” in a cellar, or “seven people living in one underground kitchen and a little dead child lying in the same room” while “[e]lsewhere is a poor widow, her three children, and a child who had been dead thirteen days”, while the husband/father had just committed suicide.<sup>9</sup> People were reduced to, and described in the language of, animals in their dens.

William Booth wrote:

*Talk about Dante's Hell, and all the horrors and cruelties of the torture-chamber of the lost! The man who walks with open eyes and with bleeding heart through the shambles of our civilization needs no such fantastic images of the poet to teach him horror. Often and often, when I have seen the young and the poor and the helpless go down before my eyes into the morass, trampled underfoot by beasts of prey in human shape that haunt these regions, it seemed as if God were no longer in his world, but that in His stead reigned a fiend, merciless as Hell, ruthless as the grave. Hard it is, no doubt, to read in Stanley's pages of the slave-traders coldly arranging for the surprise of a village, the capture of the inhabitants, the massacre of those who resist, and the violation of all the women; but the stony streets of London, if they could but speak, would tell of tragedies as awful, of ruin as complete, of ravishments as horrible, as if we were in Central Africa' only the ghastly devastation is covered, corpselike, with the artificialities and hypocrisies of modern civilization.*<sup>10</sup>

As Victorian explorers headed off to 'discover' the heart of darkness, the social explorers believed there were similar discoveries to be made at home. Booth asked, “As there is a

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Mearns (1883) *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* in Keating (ed.) (1981) *Into unknown England 1866-1913: Selections from the social explorers* (Fontana, Glasgow), pp.94-5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.95-6.

<sup>10</sup> William Booth (1890) *In Darkest England and the Way Out* in Keating (ed.) (1981) *Into unknown England 1866-1913: Selections from the social explorers* (Fontana, Glasgow), pp.146-147.

darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England?"<sup>11</sup>, while George Sims wrote:

*The woes of an Egyptian, or a Bulgarian, or a Zulu send a thrill of indignation through honest John Bull's veins; and yet at his very door there is a race so oppressed, so hampered, and so utterly neglected, that its condition has become a national scandal.*<sup>12</sup>

That 'race' – the urban proletariat – was the obverse of Victorian England's self-image. In South Africa today, the poor are the anti-podal face of the African Renaissance, with disturbing echoes of colonial stereotypes of 'natives' that jar harshly with the lifestyles of the sleek new black bourgeoisie. Jammed into slums, the Victorian poor lacked basic infrastructure or services and lived in filth and disease. Employment was scarce, uncertain and poorly paid when found. Prostitution and crime were rational employment choices. Alcohol and substance abuse were rife. As William Booth reported, "Drunkenness and all manner of uncleanness, moral and physical, abound... Multiply the sufferings of ... one drunkard by the hundred thousand, and you have some idea of what scenes are being witnessed in all our great cities at the moment".<sup>13</sup> There is an obvious and direct continuity from then to now, from industrial England to post-apartheid South Africa, where Finance Minister Trevor Manuel recently rejected the idea of food vouchers for the poor because there was no way of ensuring that the vouchers "will be used ... for food only, and not to buy alcohol and other things".<sup>14</sup>

Comparisons with Africa appear repeatedly in the literature. Booth noted that, "Darkest England, like Darkest Africa, reeks with malaria. The foul and fetid breath of our slums is almost as poisonous as that of the African swamp". He went on to note that

*As in Africa, streams intersect the forest in every direction, so the gin-shop stands at every corner with its River of the Water of Death flowing seventeen hours out of the twenty-four for the destruction of the people.*<sup>15</sup>

Many of the woes of the urban poor were reflected in the novels of the day, with Dickens probably the exemplar of the genre. The era of the poor-house, work-house, child labour and human brutalism were reflected in the woes *inter alia* of *Little Dorrit* and *Oliver Twist*, as the urban poor soon came

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<sup>11</sup> Keating *Social explorers op cit* 'Introduction', p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Keating *Social explorers op cit.*, p.20.

<sup>13</sup> Booth *op cit.*, p.148.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *The Daily News* 8 May 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Booth *Darkest England op cit*, p. 148.

to dominate the thinking – and worrying – of politicians and intellectuals. The rural poor, decimated by mechanisation, were crowded off the agenda, their regression reflected in the cyclical rural/urban migrations of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, where each urban interlude serves to further damage or degrade the protagonist.

The oeuvre reached its apogee with H G Wells' *Time Machine*, where the poor crawled out of their 'abyss' (the urban social explorer's equivalent of the forest<sup>16</sup>) to feed on the effete wealthy *eloi* who lived above ground, in the clear air and sweet gardens, before disappearing underground and out of sight again. The social explorer Masterman, in *From the Abyss*, described how London streets became "congested with a weird and uncanny people" who

*...poured in as dense black masses ... they have been hurried up in incredible number through tubes sunk in the bowels on the earth, emerging like rats from a drain, blinking in the sunshine.*<sup>17</sup>

#### *Deserving and undeserving poor*

The notion of a deserving and an undeserving poor had been around from the time the poor laws were first introduced in England in the 1600s. The distinction sharpened as the reform movements of the 1830s gathered momentum and steadily came to dominate politics (the poor, of course, had no vote). The overriding concern was the societal bifurcation that was taking place, coupled with the growing size and industrial militancy of the urban proletariat. Benjamin Disraeli as novelist famously wrote in *Sybil* that there existed:

*Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.*

When the character Egremont asks, tentatively, 'You speak of \_\_\_?', the reply is flung back (in upper case): "THE RICH AND THE POOR". For Disraeli as Prime Minister and novelist, the key concern was political: how could urban poverty and increasing unrest be stopped from tearing the nation in half. Could the centre be made to hold?

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<sup>16</sup> See Keating: *Social explorers op cit.*, p.20-22.

<sup>17</sup> C G F Masterman *From the Abyss* (1902) quoted in Keating *Social Explorers op cit.*, p.241. The image is sustained in the twenty first century science fiction writing of British author Stephen Baxter. See for example his *Destiny's Children* sequence (Gollancz, London).

The clarity of focus was the basis from which Disraeli attempted to construct a social compact – a century later, Mbeki fought a general election on the basis of a 'social contract' needed to unite South Africa. For Mbeki too saw two nations, similarly rent by poverty, but also by race:

*One of these nations [said Mbeki in 1998] is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure ... The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity.<sup>18</sup>*

Disraeli was motivated by the need to bring the two nations together, for reasons of both "revolutionary threat and humanitarian disgrace."<sup>19</sup> The point was not to pose an either/or choice, but to understand the mix of motives and act accordingly. In Mbeki a more bleak pessimism was evident. Surveying South Africa, he argued that: "[W]e are not one nation, but two nations. And neither are we becoming one nation".<sup>20</sup> Post-1994, revolutionary threat was less a concern than an apocalyptic culmination to centuries of moral disgrace. The xenophobic violence of 2008 suggests that pent-up social violence was closer to the surface than had been thought.

A decade since Mbeki's speech, significant investments and headway have been made by his government in remedying the deliberately under-developed infrastructure provided to black South Africans, and yet an average of 10 000 protests are recorded annually by police, many aimed at poor service delivery by the democratic government. This does not represent a 'revolutionary threat' and certainly seems not to transform into electoral threats to the ruling ANC. The ANC prioritised poverty despite the absence of a revolutionary threat, not because of it.

But that leaves 'humanitarian disgrace' as the motivating force – and, as we see below, its efficacy as a rallying cry has begun to wane. Most analysts agree that while poverty has dropped, particularly after social grants were provided,

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<sup>18</sup> T. Mbeki, *Africa: The time has come*, (Cape Town, Tafelberg/Mafube, 1998), p.72.

<sup>19</sup> Keating: *Social explorers op cit.*, 'Introduction', p.12.

<sup>20</sup> Mbeki, *Africa*, p.72.

poverty remains a defining feature of South Africa, and inequality, more pointedly, even more so. And some of those (as Booth had it) whose eyes were open and hearts were bleeding in 1994 have begun to harden their hearts as they seem to detect in the poor a deficiency, a moral weakness, that makes them slide easily into dependency, feeding off 'handouts' from the state, doing nothing to help themselves or lift themselves out of poverty. As Mbeki noted in early 2008, our "proud nation" needed help; "our people" by 2008 needed to be taught that they have an "obligation to contribute to their own development and the development of the country"<sup>21</sup>

### *Morality*

Most social explorers were motivated by moral concerns (though more base motives such as voyeurism are also detectable). Their approach was to observe and understand rather than judge – though (as ever) judgementalism was rife among political commentators. The social explorers repeatedly emphasised

*...that poverty dictates how people behave and that is it meaningless to try to bring to bear easy middle-class morality.*<sup>22</sup>

As Keating noted,

*...again and again they suspend moral judgement and their own deeply-held beliefs in the more crucial cause of human understanding and compassion.*<sup>23</sup>

This was not easy, given for example that as in South Africa, "the investigation of poverty led inevitably to some kind of contact with crime"<sup>24</sup> – Jack London, for example, hired a private detective to follow him in his travels in subterranean London, to ensure his safe passage out. Rowntree, who conducted the first poverty census in York,

*...confirmed that poverty was by no means confined to the weak, lazy, and debased, but was the regular condition of a large proportion of decent hard-working families.*<sup>25</sup>

It was clear that what Keating refers to as 'mid-Victorian paternalism' had failed the working class and urban poor, and that new thinking and approaches were needed to deal with deep-rooted and widespread urban poverty – primarily by the state. Along with new expertise in poverty measurement came

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<sup>21</sup> Mbeki 'Address' *op cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Keating: *Social explorers op cit.*, 'Introduction', p.18.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

poverty experts, and the new discipline of social work, which promised an 'exit plan' from poverty – for the deserving poor, prepared to work hard, at least. There was a growing recognition that the state would have to play a far greater role than previously – the poverty problem was too large for philanthropy, religion or voluntarism to resolve, and too much of a threat to stability to leave alone.

Sympathy, suspension of easy moral judgements, a search for compassion and human solidarity, and a call for (far) greater state action, all emanated from these early poverty students and their outputs. They also gave impetus to a range of political responses to poverty, from conservative through liberal to revolutionary. There was no linear path to the post-war Beveridge Report and welfare state, but the social explorers and their poverty research laid the basis for the social action, poverty development and mobilisation needed to get there. Similar attributes mark some segments of the ruling ANC; but others in the ruling party grudgingly accept that "[w]e must make sure that at least there is some cushion for the poor so that they don't fall even lower than they are now" while insisting that "we must also do certain things that would reduce the dependence of people on grants".<sup>26</sup> The role of government, for this latter group, is "to cultivate that sentiment among our people to say: 'I too have a responsibility to do something about my own development'."<sup>27</sup> The very clear implication is that 'our people', a few years after uniting sufficiently to overthrow apartheid, lack self-reliance and require its inculcation.

But the social explorers were remarkable for their suspension of judgement. Throughout the period, an uneasy duality remained at play among the consumers of social exploration literature and political commentators – sympathy, sometimes empathy, combined with a lingering fear that some moral weakness or defect was among the causal factors of poverty, much as we see in South Africa today. This seemed to be confirmed in external form when thousands of working class volunteers, geed up by jingoistic recruiting for the 'Boer War', had to be turned away as physically defective and unfit for military service. Offering a view to be repeated for decades to come – military service as a panacea for the inveterately lazy – Matthew Arnold had already looked enviously across the Channel to the more masculine French where

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<sup>26</sup> President Thabo Mbeki, quoted in *Business Day* 17/3/2008.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

*...through their military service the idea of public duty and discipline was brought to the mind of those masses, in other respects, so raw and uncultivated.*<sup>28</sup>

Tolstoy saw similar processes of proletarianisation occurring in Russia, but his wistful solution was a return to a rural, peasant idyll. In England, Carlyle had long been writing about the dangers facing the state as its 'two nations' developed and diverged, but his more radical solution (to call for a *coup* by the elite) was accompanied by an acceptance that the governing class needed to know far more about those they governed. What Carlyle shared with the social explorers, novelists and others, was an acknowledgement that both 'revolutionary threat and humanitarian disgrace' had to be avoided. The question was: how?

Facing the same issues, Gladstone had appealed to the ruling classes

*...that we have got to groom millions of hard hands; that it must be done by force, fraud or goodwill; that the latter has been tried, and is answering.*<sup>29</sup>

The two nations concept was taken up in England "because it expresse[d] perfectly the fears and difficulties of an emergent democratic society."<sup>30</sup> A similar set of problems would face the ANC when it took power a century or so later. The ANC and its allies were faced with a large poor population, overwhelmingly black, recently mobilised in defiance of apartheid, increasingly urbanising, "fertile ground", the ANC warned, "for those intent on fermenting [sic] violence"<sup>31</sup>, with a clear need for state intervention but insufficient resources for (and no consensus around the need for or viability of) a full welfare state. Poverty had to be defeated for humanitarian and revolutionary reasons. The question remained, how?

### **The undeserving poor**

"Attacking poverty and deprivation", the African National Congress announced prior to winning power in 1994, was "the first priority of the democratic government".<sup>32</sup> The ANC blueprint for post-apartheid South Africa, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), asserted (after the

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew Arnold (1981 ed.) *Culture and anarchy* (Press Syndicate of University of Cambridge, Cambridge), p.76.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Wilson A N (2002) *The Victorians* (Hutchinson, London), p.443.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>31</sup> African National Congress (1994). *The Reconstruction and Development Programme* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg), p.14 (at 2.1.1).

<sup>32</sup> African National Congress (1994). *The Reconstruction and Development Programme* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg), p.15 (2.2.2).

introduction and overview) from its first word, sentence and paragraph, that poverty lay at the heart of the challenge facing a democratic government.

But in the heady days of the early 1990s, few noted the extent to which the RDP – like its progenitor, the ANC-led tripartite alliance<sup>33</sup> – was a compromise between different organisations made up of different individuals, classes, races and backgrounds, with accompanying differences in ideology, outlook and emphasis, then united in opposition to apartheid. As time has passed, so the fissures have deepened and become more apparent. Internal differences had been obscured by hostility to a common enemy in apartheid, and a common goal, attainment of a non-racial democracy, helped by a huge wave of global and local support. Thus, while poverty was the declared enemy and ‘the poor’ the primary beneficiaries of ANC government policies, the RDP, having adopted distinctly non-pro-poor user-fees for services<sup>34</sup>, went on to warn in oddly Thatcherite language (qualified by apostrophes):

*Although a much stronger welfare system is needed to support all the vulnerable, the old, the disabled and the sick who currently live in poverty, a system of ‘handouts’ for the unemployed should be avoided. All South Africans should have the opportunity to participate in the economic life of the country.*<sup>35</sup>

From the outset, the ANC showed differences of emphasis and approach to poverty and the role of the state. Over time, these different voices have become more evident and culminated in a head-to-head clash at the 2007 ANC National Conference. Broad brush strokes are unavoidable, but one side promotes an all-out war on poverty with a heavy social welfare emphasis, and looks to social grants (if not a full welfare state) and a more interventionist ‘developmental state’ to back up the fight. This set of views has the support of COSATU and the SACP, the churches, and some elements of civil society. The other side, including senior government officials, business and much of the media, emphasises ‘the dignity of work’ as the primary anti-apartheid intervention and deploys supply-side interventions to try and coax the market to function appropriately. It is increasingly irritated with what President Thabo Mbeki described recently as

*...the already prevalent notion that our people are entitled to hold out their hands to receive all manner*

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<sup>33</sup> The tripartite alliance comprised the ANC, the South African Communist Party, and the Congress of South African trade Unions.

<sup>34</sup> ANC: RDP op cit, p. 15 (at 2.2.2)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.8 (at 2.3.3).

*of benefits, while government is obliged to deliver such benefits.*<sup>36</sup>

The first set of views is commonly seen to have moved into ascendancy at the ANC's recent national conference in Polokwane, which saw Jacob Zuma and his supporters wrest control of the ANC from Mbeki. As a result, many ANC supporters are looking forward to greater investment in poor rural areas, expanded social welfare services, and greater redistributive interventions including state-directed land redistribution, expanded social grants, and so on. They took over from the group most closely associated with the other set of views, which includes Mbeki, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel (and his Treasury), and many others in senior government positions, who warn of the unsustainability of expanding existing social grants (let alone developing a welfare state) and emphasise the need to create jobs as the only viable route out of poverty. In this climate, conservative commentators warn darkly that welfare can "perpetuate dependency" and declaim that recipients – dependent as they are – "cannot truly be called free".<sup>37</sup>

They are joined by many in business and their media supporters, who claim that South Africa has already irretrievably "committed itself to becoming a welfare state" with the inevitable result of generating "perverse incentives" that "reward a certain type of behaviour ... [that is] almost never ... economically rational".<sup>38</sup> The archetypal 'lazy native' has rejoined the discourse. Few pause to consider whether the market will ever reach the spatial areas where the 'ultra-poor'<sup>39</sup> live. Many of these areas were specifically selected for blacks by the apartheid regime and its predecessors precisely because their lack of economic potential ensured a steady flow of migrant labour while providing spurious grounds for denying full citizenship to those living there. Stopping welfare 'dependence' seems more important than acknowledging these basic facts of history in case they also signal market failure. Rather, (supposed) dependence and dependents are demonised while the market remains deified to the point of ineffability.

The intractability of poverty over time seems to have hardened hearts. Since 1994, the ANC government has thrown enormous resources at infrastructure and service provision,

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<sup>36</sup> President Thabo Mbeki: 'Address during the Community Development Worker Indaba', Gallagher Estate, Midrand, 14 March 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Kane-Berman J. 'Analysing the poverty of the President's attack' in *Business Day* 22/11/2007.

<sup>38</sup> *Financial Mail* 'Editorial', at <http://free.financialmail.co.za/budget2007/overview/aedop.htm> accessed 06/03/2008.

<sup>39</sup> This group is described below.

public works, skills development programmes, as well as providing free basic services and massively expanded social grants, while reconfiguring inter-government relations to place the local sphere and local demand at the centre of governance; backed up by a host of sector-based programmes and projects. Many of these interventions have been successful, others less so, while inter-governmental relations will take years to bear fruit. Government as a whole has been roundly attacked by leftwing critics for pursuing a neo-liberal and/or overly nationalist approach to growth and development which is seen to have pandered to international capital and/or prioritised developing a national bourgeoisie rather than prioritising the needs of the poor above these other constituencies.

Nonetheless, most would agree that while operating within a capitalist framework that accommodated the post-Cold War Washington Consensus, the ANC government has committed significant resources to 'development' in broad terms. But thus far, the return on investment has been less than stellar. The post-apartheid period has witnessed massive rural-to-urban migration, as poor people follow the improved infrastructure and services, primarily available in urban areas for reasons of cost, accessibility and ease of delivery. Debate continues<sup>40</sup> unabated about the precise extent of poverty, but there is general consensus that poverty levels remained appallingly high – around half the population – until social grants kicked in, in the early years of the new millennium.<sup>41</sup>

### *The lumpen-poor*

Part of the problem, it has been suggested, is the failure of government to disaggregate 'the poorest of the poor'<sup>42</sup> so as to better (or even adequately) understand the different types of need and disadvantage operating in South Africa, the different groups and individuals affected, and then to create programmes (with appropriate 'exit plans') tailored to meet

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<sup>40</sup> See for example the on-going Meth/van den Berg *et al* stand-off (as summarized by Meth) in Meth C. (2008) 'The (lame) duck unchained tries to count the poor', School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Working Paper 49, mimeo; also van den Berg S., Burger R., Rulof B, Louw M and Yu D. (2006) 'Trends in poverty and inequality since the political transition', Development Policy Research Unit Working Paper.

<sup>41</sup> See Everatt D., Smith M. and Solanki G. (2006) 'Baseline survey of the 21 ISRD and URP nodes' (Strategy & Tactics, Department of Social Development, mimeo); and Meth C. 'Half measures revisited: The ANC's unemployment and poverty reduction goals' in Bhorat H. and Kanbur R. (ed.s) (2006) *Poverty and policy in post-apartheid South Africa* (Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria), pp.366-458.

<sup>42</sup> See Everatt D (2001) 'The politics of poverty' in Everatt D. and Maphai V (ed.s) (2001) *The (real) state of the nation: South Africa since 1994* (Interfund, Johannesburg); see also Seekings J (2007) 'Deserving individuals and groups: justifying the shape of South Africa's welfare state' (CSSR Working Paper 193), p.20.

actual needs. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into why this may be the case, though the ideological splits in the ruling party are an obvious culprit, and may be joined by an unwillingness to select one group above another, as may a tetchy nationalist sensitivity to colonial stereotyping. What is clear is that in the midst of fierce political contestation within the tripartite alliance, targeting is a non-started. The losers, sadly, are those most in need. Few if any critics go beyond the general point to identify who those 'deserving' groups or individuals may be, and what it is they most need. This paper makes a small contribution in this regard, building on substantial quantitative research conducted in the poorest nodes in South Africa.<sup>43</sup>

Targeting is a central issue – not simply the challenge of delivering to identified groups without administrative costs outweighing benefits, but the prior step of specifying who the target groups may be. This requires political courage from a government, in that some (voters, of course) will have to be prioritised above others (also voters). With 70% of the vote, this should not be beyond the reach of the ANC government.

In 1994, the RDP set out a limited number of very general target groups, presumably because in the immediate post-apartheid period it was reasonable to assert that all black people (including African, Indian and coloureds in the definition) were targets – they had all been "historically disadvantaged". Moreover, there was far greater unit among members of the tripartite alliance.

Both "affirmative action" and "developmental social welfare" shared "particularly needy groups" as targets, including blacks, women, children, youth, people with disabilities, rural communities, people in informal settlements, farm-workers and the elderly.<sup>44</sup> Although few in name these were huge in remit: taken together, these 'target groups' comprised more than 8 in 10 of all South Africans, and more focused targeting was clearly required. But the RDP did not help: "Social security measures" were to focus on "domestic workers, agricultural workers, seasonal workers, workers who are disabled, women, the homeless, and families in rural and informal settlements".<sup>45</sup> The RDP also urged social security to target families with no income, women and children who were victims of violence, young offenders, and everyone affected by substance abuse.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See Everatt *et al* (2006) 'Baseline survey' *op cit*.

<sup>44</sup> ANC RDP *op cit.*, pp.16-17 (at 2.2.6) and p.25 (at 2.13.4.2)

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55 (at 2.13.13).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55 (at 2.13.15)

Despite being written in technocratic language and offering itself as a "policy framework"<sup>47</sup> The RDP was a wish-list. A great deal of research had taken place in the early 1990s, into various sectors (women, youth, children and so on), but little if any of the associated disaggregation was reflected in the RDP. This was perhaps predictable: the ANC was not about to specify who might miss out on the massive expectations of the post-apartheid state. Moreover, apartheid had ensured that all blacks were oppressed, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, which the RDP reflected. But given the different views within the ANC – 'welfare' vs. 'handouts' – there may have been more going on than vote maximising or casting the net as widely as possible.

This is strongly suggested by the persistence and worsening of non-specificity. Poverty retains a high profile in ANC and government discourse, but the poor remain oddly lifeless, populating broad categories such as 'the poorest of the poor' or 'the most deprived' – rarely are they distinct groups of people, with identities, needs, problems, challenges, hopes, fears and strengths – all the things the social explorers tried to give the poor they studied. The dangers of this approach have been spelled out<sup>48</sup>, including the very basic fact that if government doesn't know who it is targeting and why (i.e. what they lack and what they need), the scale of resources thrown at the problem is irrelevant: failure is a near certainty.

Meth has commented on the contradictory situation where the South African government is committed to a host of international conventions with their targets (such as the Millennium Development Goals), and yet curiously lacks a domestic anti-poverty strategy and attendant domestic poverty reduction targets.<sup>49</sup> But target *groups* (people as opposed to economic goals) remain absent from the outputs of both government and commentators, beyond what has gone before – 'the poorest of the poor', or the RDP-derived listing of women, children, youth and so on – a problem sure to damage the design and implementation of any serious intervention.

Surely this had changed by late 2007 – 13 years after apartheid – as the ANC approached its 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference? With 12.5 million people receiving social grants, costing more than 3.4% of gross domestic product and, according to Minister Skweyiya of the Department of Social Development, leading to an "incalculable" impact "on poverty

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<sup>47</sup> Nelson Mandela's Preface to *RDP op cit.*

<sup>48</sup> See Everatt *The politics of poverty op cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Meth C. (2004) 'Half measures: the ANC's unemployment and poverty reduction goals', Development Policy Research Unit working paper 04/89 (University of KwaZulu-Natal).

alleviation and social cohesion in the country" <sup>50</sup> surely the ruling party and the government it leads have developed a refined and focused targeting strategy with tailored programmes? Or do we still inhabit a terrain where 'incalculable' means 'impossible to calculate' rather than a more positive adjectival use?

*The ANC and poverty, 2007/8*

If the RDP was unambiguous about fighting poverty as its primary policy goal in 1993/4, the situation was more complex by 2007. As the ANC made clear in its conference documents, it faced "accumulated weaknesses" and "new tendencies", while "social distance, patronage, careerism, corruption and abuse of powers; ineffective management of the interface between the movement and the state..." all affected the party 13 years later. <sup>51</sup>

The ANC emphasised its "continuing resolve to challenge underdevelopment and eradicate poverty" <sup>52</sup> – running the concepts together, and with the different voices, definitional imprecision and judgementalism still evident:

*Whilst many families have access to social grants and other poverty alleviation programmes, many of these households and communities remain trapped in poverty, are dependent on the state and thus unable to access the opportunities created by the positive economic climate.* <sup>53</sup>

The quotation neatly highlights many of the problems that bedevil government's anti-poverty efforts. These include a strong, crusading sense of purpose mixed with a blurry notion of means ("exit programmes" <sup>54</sup>) and of target groups; moral doubts over the dependent poor wanting "handouts"; and unerring optimism (all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding) that economic growth is creating jobs for un- and semi-skilled workers *in the places they live*, thus allowing them to "take themselves out of poverty" <sup>55</sup>.

*The ever-expanding list*

The lack of definitional clarity makes it tricky to answer the question: what exactly is it that the ANC and government want to achieve, beyond the obvious notion of lifting

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<sup>50</sup> Minister Zola Skweyiya: Keynote address, International Social Security Conference, 10/03/2008 at [http://www.polity.org.za/article.php?a\\_id+128904](http://www.polity.org.za/article.php?a_id+128904) accessed 2008/03/14.

<sup>51</sup> African National Congress (2007a): 'ANC 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference 2007: resolutions' at <http://www.anc.org.za>, 'Organisational Renewal' p.2. (at para 8).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Social Transformation' p.13 (para 3).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* (para 5)

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* (9)

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 'Social Transformation (at 9)

everyone out of poverty? And who primarily is meant to benefit from its interventions? Equally difficult is know how to measure its performance in the 'war on poverty'. For example, the quotation above and accompanying conference documents elide as targets family, household and community; do the same with underdevelopment and poverty eradication, and with poverty eradication, alleviation and reduction; and (immediately following the quotation) again with "poverty and underdevelopment" on one hand and "poverty and inequality" on the other.<sup>56</sup> There is a danger that the question shifts from 'what is to be done?' to 'does the ANC know what it wants to do?'. .

A brief scan of social and economic conference documents shows the ANC committing itself *inter alia* to:

- "...empower people to take themselves out of poverty"<sup>57</sup>
- Develop "a comprehensive social security net" to provide an "impeccable approach in eradicating poverty and unemployment"<sup>58</sup>
- "...create decent work for all and eliminate poverty"<sup>59</sup>
- "...ongoing programmes to defeat poverty"<sup>60</sup>
- Build development finance institution capacity<sup>61</sup>
- "Build the capacity of the state to mobilise the people as a whole, especially the poor"<sup>62</sup>
- "...deracialising the ownership and control of productive assets by black people, women and youth"<sup>63</sup>
- "A comprehensive and clear rural development strategy"<sup>64</sup>
- Public works, linked to home-based care and an integrated youth development strategy as well as gender equality<sup>65</sup>
- "Maintaining and where appropriate expanding the provision of social grants"<sup>66</sup>
- "...a clear strategy that seeks to empower the poor, particularly those who already derive all or part of their livelihoods from the exploitation of productive land" including land reform<sup>67</sup>
- "...strengthen the voice of rural South Africans, empower poor communities ... help those working the land"<sup>68</sup>
- Free basic services especially in rural areas.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* pp.6-7, (paras 6 and 7).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* (9)

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* (9)

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 'Economic Transformation' (4)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* (4.d.)

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* (7)

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* (1.10)

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* (2.3)

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* (2.4)

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* (2.4, 2.7)

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* (2.8)

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 'Rural development, land reform and agrarian change' (15)

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* (2)

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* (13)

All worthy and important commitments, but the question remains, how?

The point is not to question the massive task facing the ANC, nor to demand of a political party at conference the detailed precision of a programme design document. But the imprecision cited here is replicated in official government documents – and in programme design document and after 14 years in power, the ANC knows this full well. If methods were many and unclear, this was amplified where target groups were concerned. Conference documents cited the following<sup>70</sup>:

- Black people
- Rural areas
- African people
- Communities
- "...low-income groups"
- African women
- Rural South Africans
- Women
- "...the rural poor"
- Rural women
- Families
- Households
- People with disabilities
- Youth
- Children
- Child-headed households
- "Veterans of the struggle" (60+ years of age, activists for 40+ years)
- "Vulnerable children of [ANC] veterans"
- "...the most vulnerable"
- Umkhonto we Sizwe veterans (ex-combatants)
- "...historically disadvantaged persons"
- Small businesses
- Co-operatives
- "Poor communities"
- Small-scale agriculture
- "...low-income earners"
- Micro-enterprises
- "...the poor"
- Informal settlements
- Rural entrepreneurs
- Farm-workers
- People living in former Bantustans
- Farm-dwellers
- "...the poor, particularly those who already derive all or part of their livelihoods from the exploitation of productive land"
- "...high school learners in poorer communities"
- "...household producers in former bantustans"
- "...young people"
- Small businesses

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<sup>70</sup> All are taken from the same documents from which the preceding list was derived.

- Pensioners
- Small-holders/family farms
- Residents of urban and peri-urban areas that wish to engage in agricultural livelihoods
- Small-scale and subsistence farmers
- "...those working the land"
- "...small farmers, especially women"
- Producer co-operatives, small-holder associations, input supply co-operatives, marketing co-operatives, small rural producers.

The ANC's *Strategy & Tactics*, its core strategic document, is only slightly more helpful. It asserts, absolutely correctly, that

*If there were to be any single measure of the civilising mission of the National Democratic Revolution, it would be how it treats the most vulnerable in our society.*<sup>71</sup>

But then it shoots itself in the foot. Hopes for a clear directive as to who comprise 'the most vulnerable' fade as the document cites "Africans in particular and Blacks in general", women, "those who occupied the lowest rungs on the apartheid social ladder" as well as "those in [sic] the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder", victims of patriarchy, youth, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, emergent and small-scale farmers and co-operatives, "the poor in rural areas", the family, the unemployed, "the poor and those at risk", "citizens in informal settlements as well as female-headed households and single households". Fair enough, the ANC has set itself the massive task of "eradicat[ing] the specific relations of production that underpinned the national and gender oppression and super-exploitation of the majority of South Africans"<sup>72</sup>; but to do so requires more clarity and focus than the spray-and-pray approach of its policy documents.

For example, if we narrow our purview specifically onto developmental welfare (the ANC's approach to welfare) we may reasonably expect a sharper focus. Minister Zola Skweyiya recently outlined government's approach to welfare, "an indispensable component of social justice".<sup>73</sup> He noted that "[o]ur African heritage has taught us to revere our older people, and to care for the poorest in society" and to accept that "[w]hen difficult choices must be made, we must discuss how we prioritise"<sup>74</sup> – a rare foray by an ANC Minister into targeting territory and the choices it demands. As targets he cited the elderly, women, children, and then added the

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<sup>71</sup> ANC (2007b): *Strategy & Tactics 2008* at <http://www.anc.org.za/documents>

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Skweyiya 'Keynote address' *op cit.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

informal sector as well as "the poor in remote rural areas".<sup>75</sup> In other words, just as the Minister accepted a critical point – "to prioritize different groups for improved protection"<sup>76</sup> and move away from the lengthy wish-lists of the past – so he added a new array of targets to the list, including the informal sector, which may be survivalist but is not commonly associated with society's 'poorest' members. The temptation to expand the list of worthy recipients seems irresistible.

Skweyiya went on to argue that "our social security institutions can no longer be limited to playing a passive role of income redistribution", echoing current discourse around the (erstwhile) developmental state in South Africa. But instead of sharpening the focus, Skweyiya broadened it to include "[c]ompetitiveness, innovation and growth" which, he argued, "are increasingly ... part of the domain and responsibility of social security".<sup>77</sup> Given the notable failures of a clutch of other Departments and parastatals to effectively nurture the so-called 'second economy', in which the informal sector squats, its being taken up by Social Welfare is not encouraging. For a Department which remains under-staffed, and whose field staff largely comprise social workers who have yet to come to terms with 'developmental welfare', this is a worrying prospect indeed.

#### *An anti-poverty strategy*

Above all, what is missing in South Africa today is any genuine *strategy* for poverty alleviation and/or eradication and/or reduction; thankfully, this has (belatedly) been acknowledged by the ruling party, one of the more positive outcomes of the bruising leadership and ideological battle at Polokwane in late 2007. *Strategy & Tactics* ended by calling for an integrated anti-poverty strategy "with the objective of eradicating poverty and creating employment"<sup>78</sup>:

*Our attack on poverty must seek to empower people to take themselves out of poverty, while creating adequate social nets to protect the most vulnerable in our society.*<sup>79</sup>

These are sentiments that all South Africans would presumably agree with, even if we remain in the dark about who comprise 'the most vulnerable in our society' or what the ANC plans to do for or about them.

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> ANC *Strategy & Tactics* 'Social Transformation', p.1. (6)

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2 (10)

President Mbeki, already unseated as ANC President, made some important remarks in this regard in his State of the Nation address in February 2008. Poverty may have been the first word in the RDP, but in his speech it appeared after the 2010 World Cup, electricity blackouts, crime and pages dealing with macro-economic management – reasonably reflecting the government’s agenda, if not its propaganda.<sup>80</sup> Mbeki noted that the proposed anti-poverty strategy would address “especially sections of the population most affected” including children, women, youth, the elderly, people living in rural areas and urban informal settlements, and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses. That this is not targeting in any meaningful sense is evidenced by a very quick analysis of Census 2001 data:

<b>Total population: 44,819,781</b>	
<b>Specified 'target groups'</b>	<i>Start with all females</i>
	23,385,742
	<i>Add male children (0-13)</i>
	6,685,195
	<i>Add male youth (14-35)</i>
	8,817,953
	<i>Add male elderly (66+)</i>
	735,725
	<i>Add males (35-64) with disability</i>
	453,988
<i>Add males (35-64) with no disabilities in informal area</i>	
412,437	
<i>Add males (35-64) with no disabilities in rural area</i>	
1,487,705	
<b>Total number in 'target groups': 41,978,745</b>	
<b>% target group of total population: 94%</b>	

**Table 1: Quantifying government 'target groups' (source: Census 2001 data<sup>81</sup>)**

If we quantify Mbeki’s stated targets, the cumulative total is 94% of the South African population.

No new initiatives were announced to complement the existing battery of programmatic interventions, beyond a special investigation into children aged 14+ (who by law are in fact ‘youth’ not children). Mbeki did announce the intention of compiling a roster of all impoverished households and individuals in order to source solutions directly to those in

<sup>80</sup> ‘State of the Nation Address of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki’, February 2008.

<sup>81</sup> Using the age cohorts made available by Statistics South Africa, remembering the official definition of youth is 14-35 years of age, and not including people with illnesses since this is not included in census data.

need, an idea lifted from smaller and more centrally controlled countries such as Chile or Tunisia and destined to fail in South Africa.

It can also be asserted with reasonable confidence that Mbeki's idea of a 'National War Room for a War Against Poverty', also announced in the speech, will not work unless government accepts that Ministries cannot all operate on the basis of equality: one has to be *primus inter pares*. A planning Ministry is needed, one that has the powers of oversight and discipline, to ensure that the entire state apparatus – given the centrality of 'the war on poverty' – is continually geared to poverty reduction as its primary goal. It will require a poverty 'filter' that is applied to the strategic planning of every government Ministry and Department, to ensure that everything they plan and do is in sync with nationally agreed poverty reduction strategies and targets, and if not, to send them back for revision. That this will be hugely unpopular is not in doubt; that it is essential is witnessed by the failure to achieve anything like this via verbal commitments to co-ordination for the past 14 years.

Ministries and Departments are far from equal; and the three spheres of government are even more markedly unequal. Trying to empower any single Ministry or Department is a distinct negative within government, harking back as it does to the days of the abortive RDP Ministry that failed to bring Ministries into line in the 1994-5 period, or further entrenching the already heightened power of (inevitably conservative) Treasury. Moral rallying calls will not pull Ministries into line behind an anti-poverty initiative – if so, it would have happened already. Institutional arrangements are clearly crucial for any successful anti-poverty strategy.

#### *Moral weaknesses*

The rhetoric of an anti-poverty crusade commingles with highly ambivalent attitudes towards the poor. Anti-poverty strategies and wars on poverty cannot succeed while those for whom one takes up arms are regarded as morally deficient, that they are poor through some inherent failing, and thus less than deserving. This is what lies behind the linguistic differentiation between working and middle class people who 'rely' on the state for certain services, and the poor, who are *dependent* upon the state, lacking the moral fibre to wean themselves off their fix. That this is a strongly evident strand of thinking in the ANC, government and parastatals is quite clear.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> See for example Marais H (2007) 'Getting back to basics' in Edigheji O (ed.). *Rethinking South Africa's Development Path: Reflections on the*

Elsewhere, we are told that "in a welfare state, dependency is profound"<sup>83</sup>, and warned that "[g]rants must not create dependency and thus must be linked to economic activity".<sup>84</sup> No-one would disagree with the basic point, that decent work is far better than a social grant; some in the ANC can make the argument in less judgemental language:

*Social grants are making a huge contribution to pushing back the frontiers of rural poverty, fighting hunger and improving potential for economic growth in rural areas. However, in the struggle to build a better life for all, grants are no substitute for a broader strategy of rural development and employment creation.*<sup>85</sup>

Absolutely right – but these sentiments are continually undercut by others in the ANC. For example, a common theme in government propaganda is the need for greater communal voluntarism, even in the face of grinding poverty. Mbeki spoke recently of the need "consistently to cultivate the spirit of self-reliance among our people".<sup>86</sup> Youth are most commonly called on to provide free labour. The calls continue despite the fact that research has shown that poor people volunteer far more than rich people do, people in rural areas volunteer more than those in urban areas, women more than men, and so on. The poor are already the most active givers in South Africa<sup>87</sup>, but are continually reproached for wanting 'handouts' – they sound like the quintessential 'layabouts' who were told by Minister Norman Tebbit in Margaret Thatcher's government to get 'on yer bike!' and go find work.<sup>88</sup>

Marais quoted Minister of Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, complaining about the need to "change the thinking of those who held out hands for help but kept their sleeves down"<sup>89</sup> when it came to work, while her husband, currently deputy Minister of Finance, was quoted as saying "[w]e want a society of active citizens with

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*ANC's Policy Conference Discussion Documents*. Special edition of *Policy: Issues and actors*, 20(10) 99-106; see also Meth C. 'Ideology and social policy: 'handouts' and the spectre of 'dependency' in *Transformation* 56 (2004) and Meth (2008) 'Lame duck' *op cit*.

<sup>83</sup> ANC 2007a 'Social Transformation' *op cit* (at 8)

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, (at 17)

<sup>85</sup> ANC 2007a 'Rural development, land reform and agrarian change' *op cit* (5)

<sup>86</sup> Mbeki 'Address' *op cit*.

<sup>87</sup> See Everatt D. and Solanki G. (2008) 'A nation of givers? Results from a national survey of social giving' in Habib A. and Maharaj B. (ed.s) *Giving and solidarity: resource flows for poverty alleviation and development in South Africa* (Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria), pp. 57-59.

<sup>88</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman\\_Tebbit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Tebbit) accessed 24/04/2008.

<sup>89</sup> Marais 'Back to basics' *op cit*. p.4.

opportunities for people to participate and therefore increase their incomes and productivity".<sup>90</sup> Mbeki recently told Community Development Workers (CDWs) that "community development must be about community development, and not merely receipt of government hand-outs" and urged CDWs

*...to move as many of our people as possible out of dependence on social grants, on the basis of access to opportunities that enable current recipients of social grants of working age to become gainfully employed.*<sup>91</sup>

The *Business Day* newspaper reported him to have gone on to say that "people [must not] think it is sufficient merely to hold out their hands and receive a handout".<sup>92</sup>

After 14 years, it would appear that sympathy and empathy have a shelf-life that diminishes in inverse proportion to the resources thrown at 'development'. ANC talk of "our people" in no way cloaks the judgementalism at play – precisely the kind of negative stereotyping the 19<sup>th</sup> century social explorers so assiduously avoided in their search for empathy and accuracy.

The basic point being argued is that if government cannot specify in any detail who it is that they are trying to help, beyond 'the poor' or 'the most vulnerable', or why, beyond a general notion of alleviating 'poverty' or 'deprivation', then government will not know what those people need, and cannot provide the correct interventions (other than by luck).

*Jobs, jobs, jobs*<sup>93</sup>

That the ANC and its leaders genuinely pursue poverty alleviation (or eradication or reduction) is not in question. It is also common cause that decent work trumps a small social grant any day. But there is a moment of seemingly wilful blindness that lies behind the comments cited above, as government officials and ANC leaders sidestep the fact that unemployment stands at around 4 in 10 adults nationally and is far worse in the spatial areas most associated with poverty, and continue to berate the (undeserving) poor for not taking up the economic opportunities that growth has created as exit routes from poverty. Growth has created some jobs – but the wrong type, in the wrong places. This simple fact seems unpalatable, despite its easy explicability.

Unemployment is especially high in rural areas and informal settlements that are usually a considerable distance outside

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<sup>90</sup> Jabu Moleketi quoted in the *Mail and Guardian* 6/9/2004.

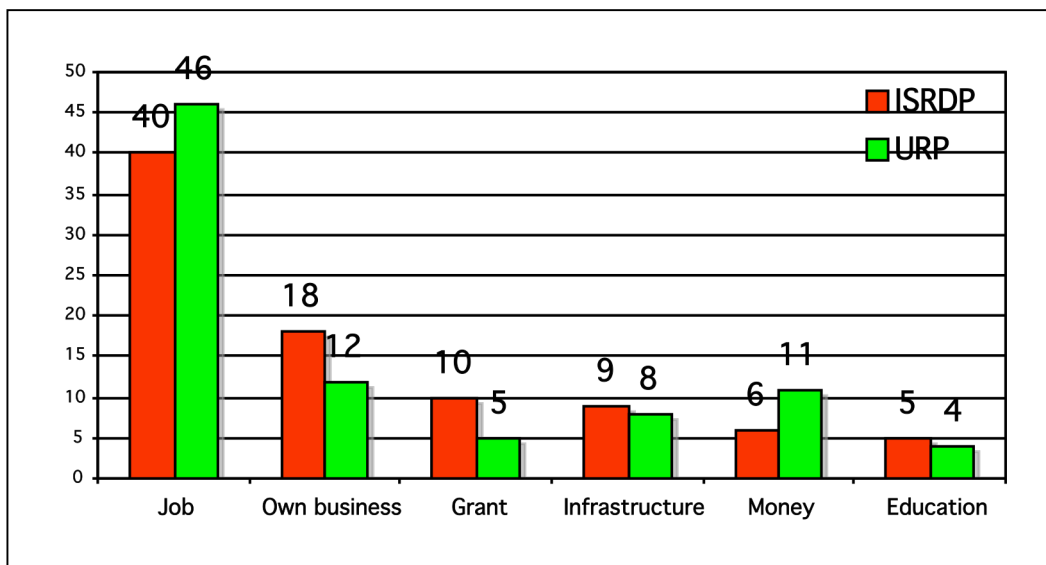
<sup>91</sup> Mbeki 'Address' *op cit*.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in *Business Day* 17/3/2008.

<sup>93</sup> An ANC election poster of 1994.

urban and metropolitan centres. In rural and informal areas, economic growth has been conspicuously absent and job creation worse. For example, the rate of unemployment in nodal points making up the Urban Renewal Programme (URP) stands at 62.6%, rising to a staggering 79.1% in the nodes of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP).<sup>94</sup>

There is complete consensus between government and the poor: the former want the poor to get jobs, but nowhere near as much as the latter wish for the same.



**Figure 1: 'What one thing would most improve your quality of life?' (ISRDP/URP baseline survey)**

In every national sample survey cited in this paper, and illustrated above, the top mention for questions such as 'what one thing that would make your life better?', is 'jobs'.<sup>95</sup> And if respondents don't want jobs, they want the opportunity to start a small business and create jobs. There are of course people who ask for grants or cash – but they are distinctly in the minority.

Job creation has been slow and stuttering and is markedly absent from the spatial areas inhabited by South Africa's poor. And in those areas, unemployment is not a short-term affair. Three-quarters (75%) of the unemployed in ISRDP nodes had been unemployed for 4 or more years, true of 61% in URP nodes. This is an important reminder of the massive challenges that face any attempt to generate sustainable economic solutions to unemployment in rural areas selected by the apartheid regime as dumping grounds for 'surplus people'.

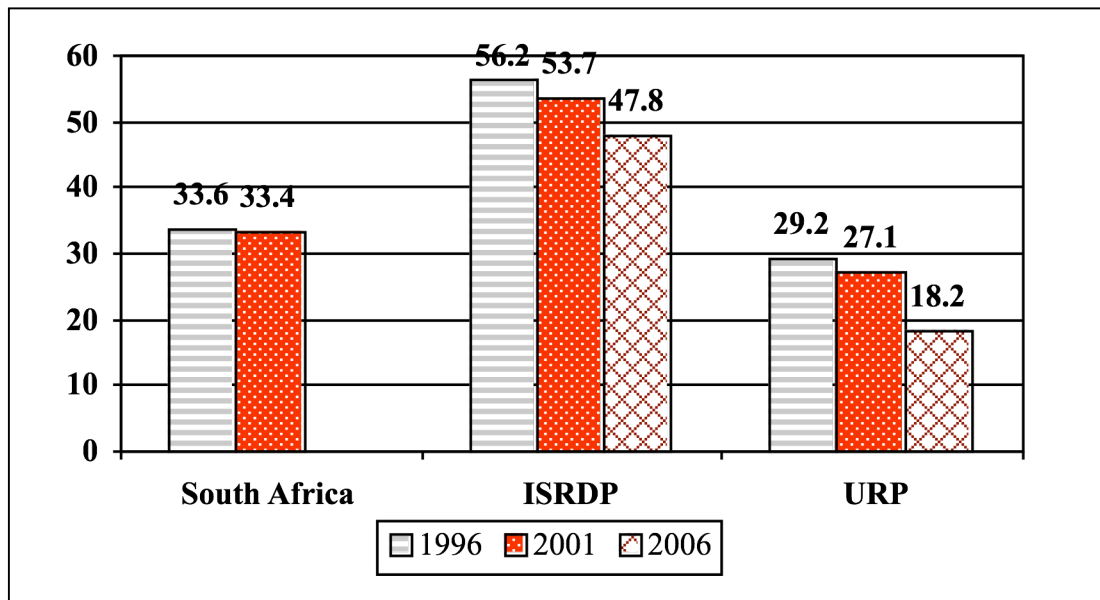
<sup>94</sup> Everatt et al (2006): 'Baseline survey' op cit.

<sup>95</sup> See for example the ISRDP/URP baseline survey as well as the Social Giving survey, cited earlier.

People are not taking economic 'exit routes' from poverty not because of some inherent deficiency that renders them dependent on handouts, but because there are no job opportunities where they live.

In the same way as the failure to disaggregate social sectors renders current targeting valueless, so too with spatial targeting. Talking of 'rural areas' or 'informal settlements' is not helpful: poverty studies have shown us that local context, and specifically local governance, is the dominant variable in understanding possibilities, opportunities and constraints.<sup>96</sup> Poverty in the 13 ISRDP nodes is far higher than in the 8 URP nodes; but poverty levels are uneven across the rural nodes, and take different form in different nodes. Rural poverty remains stubbornly resistant to quick fix blueprint solutions applied to all 'rural areas' as an homogenous mass.

That said, the general trend is downwards. Measured over time, we see a steady if unspectacular diminution in poverty in the rural nodes. Levels of poverty in the urban nodes are on average lower than those for the country as a whole (i.e. including rural areas and formal urban/metropolitan centres), reflecting the scale of rural poverty. Urban nodes are poor, but far less poor than their rural counterparts, and poor urban areas act as magnets attracting those capable of migrating out of poorer rural areas. Out-migration is the only rational economic decision particularly for young people living in rural nodes.



**Figure 2: Poverty scores for South Africa 1996/2001; for ISRDP & URP 1996, 2001, 2006**

<sup>96</sup> See Everatt *et al* 'Baseline survey' *op cit*.

The differences among rural and among urban nodes, and between rural and urban nodes, are illustrated below. Table 2 gives the poverty scores for each node are set out, the first two using census data, the third relying on a nodal baseline survey (in the absence of a 2006 census).<sup>97</sup>

	1996	2001	2006
O R Tambo	65.4	64.3	55.5
Umkhanyakude	63.8	60.6	57.6
Alfred Nzo	63.5	65.6	56.3
Umzinyathi	59.7	58.3	57.2
Sekhukhune	56.6	54	46.1
Zululand	55.7	53.9	52
Ukhahlamba	55.2	52.8	49.2
Chris Hani	53.8	51.6	47
Bohlabela	53.3	49.6	43
Ugu	50.0	50.7	50.1
Kgalagadi	50	47.6	45.7
Thabo Mofutsanyane	41.8	40.7	36.8
Central Karoo	19.2	18.5	17.6
<b>Average ISRDP nodes</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>53.7</b>	<b>47.8</b>
Inanda*	55.4	40.5	24.7
Mdantsane	32.8	28.6	16.5
Khayelitsha	31.8	31.5	27.1
Alexandra	26.5	24.4	17
Galeshewe	23.2	23.4	18.5
Mitchell's Plain*	22.6	20.3	10.6
Motherwell	22.4	30.7	16.7
KwaMashu*	18.2	24.5	14.1
<b>Average URP nodes</b>	<b>29.2</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>18.2</b>

\* Demarcation impacting on data

**Table 2: Poverty index<sup>98</sup> scores for all nodes and South Africa, 1996 and 2001**

Poverty levels rose in 5 of the 21 nodes between 1996 and 2001, dropping in the remainder (the programmes were only

<sup>97</sup> In some of the URP nodes (marked with \*), demarcation made extracting data for the node particularly complex and the data should be treated with circumspection for 1996; the 2001 figures are accurate. Inanda, for example, is an extremely poor urban node; but extracting locale-specific data from Census 1996 proved very challenging; and thus the % change in poverty levels in Inanda should be treated with caution.

<sup>98</sup> The poverty index is explained at Appendix A.

launched in 2000/2001). By 2006, poverty levels had *dropped* in every URP and ISRDP node (bar Ugu).<sup>99</sup>

The massive difference between urban and rural sites is striking. In the former, poverty levels dipped from 29.2% in 1996 to 27.1% in 2001, and then halved to 18.2% by 2006 – the impact of social grants was singularly important in achieving this. For rural nodes, the drop has been from 56.2% in 1996 to 47.8% a decade later – slow, but still important.

But equally striking is the lack of a clear pattern among rural or among urban nodes. Some rural nodes saw poverty levels drop significantly, and some saw poverty remain static or even (very slightly) rise. The same is true in urban nodes. Local governance emerges as a key variable affecting nodal development. The provincial sphere seems to have a delimited role: nodal poverty has no clear link with that of provinces or their provincial growth and development strategies. For example, within the Eastern Cape, poverty rose in Alfred Nzo by 2.1% between 1996 and 2001 – but dropped by 1.1% in the Eastern Cape's O R Tambo in the same period. Nodes seem to be unaffected – in any systematic way – by either the nationally driven ISRDP or URP; by other nationally driven interventions; or by provincial governance.

Finally, there are enormous differences and inequalities between already poor nodes. Even within this clutch of 21 poor nodes, selected as national priorities, there are stand-out priority nodes – though none are treated as such. The need for a far more sophisticated approach to targeting, resource allocation and matched delivery is evident.

#### *The (most) undeserving poor: asset vs. social poverty*

In order to take targeting slightly further, within the constraints of this paper, the baseline survey data were factor analysed. A factor analysis is an interdependence technique that seeks to find underlying relationships that help explain data. Factor analysis is also a useful technique because objective and subjective/attitudinal variables can be used together, as they were here.

Survey questions were collated into six indexes, which have been analysed and reported on at some length elsewhere<sup>100</sup>; they included poverty, social capital, service

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<sup>99</sup> These poverty scores are discussed in detail in Everatt D. (forthcoming) 'Counting them out, counting them in again: reporting from the 'war on poverty' in South Africa's poorest nodes, 1996-2006' in McLennan A. and Munslow B. (ed.s) *The State and the Politics of Delivery in South Africa* (Wits P&DM Governance Series, Wits University Press, forthcoming)

<sup>100</sup> See Everatt et al 2006: 'Baseline survey' *op cit.* (can be downloaded from [www.sarpn.org.za](http://www.sarpn.org.za))

access/quality, health status, reproductive health and gender-based violence, reflecting a broader understanding of poverty (and the key role of gender inequality as a poverty driver). The rotation generated two factors. In one, respondents with poor health status were also likely to have poor access to services (or access to poor quality services), and to have high poverty levels (including high unemployment, low income and so on). This is a classic clustering, highlighting the interrelationships between employment status, access to services and poor health.

Respondents scoring high on this factor were most likely to be found in specific rural nodes of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (which have 8 of the 13 nodes of the ISRDP), though with some of the worse-off urban nodes (such as Inanda and Khayelitsha) also featuring. Respondents were likely to be living in traditional rural homesteads or on farms, but with urban informal areas also evident. They were more likely to be women, older, and low educated, though with reasonable access to media.

In the second factor, which we refer to here as 'social poverty'<sup>101</sup>, respondents with low social capital were also likely to have deeply hostile attitudes to reproductive rights for women, and also had very negative attitudes to gender-based violence. The former included issues relating to abortion, women's right to birth control, and joint decision-making about reproductive rights issues. The latter dealt with violence against women, and the occasions on which this was deemed acceptable – which were worryingly frequent, and high amongst young and old, higher among men but worryingly high among women as well, as we have reported elsewhere.<sup>102</sup> The first casualty of low social capital, it appears, is gender.

This second group, suffering from 'social poverty', was – worryingly – distributed across all 21 nodes, with no detectable rural/urban or provincial pattern. People with low social capital and hostile attitudes to gender equality are only slightly more likely to be rural than urban residents, suggesting there is more at play than easy notions of unreconstructed rural traditionalists. Very worryingly, they are more likely to be younger than 35 years of age, suggesting that post-apartheid South Africa is failing to produce citizens with values to match the democratic Constitution. Education levels are reasonably spread, and media access again high (just 13% never access any TV, radio or print media). They are likely to reject politics as a waste of time, and four in ten are anomic, believing

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<sup>101</sup> A term also used by the ANC in its documentation, though without definition.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves incapable of influencing what happens in their communities.

To identify the truly undeserving poor, we cross-tabulated the two components (asset and social poverty), and found that 6% of the entire sample scored high on both, suggesting a natural high priority target group (the 'ultra-poor') – or, if negative stereotyping is at play, the most undeserving of all. The 21 nodes contain 4.9 million adults (using 2001 census data), and are not a particularly helpful mechanism for targeting. But the 'ultra-poor' comprise a far more focused grouping of 294 000, living in specific places and with particular attributes (that allow them to be identified and recruited into anti-poverty schemes).

These 'ultra-poor' respondents were most commonly located in KwaZulu-Natal (59% of them), the Eastern Cape (22%) and Free State (10%). They were also overwhelmingly rural (within these provinces), living on farms (54%) or traditional homesteads (24%). They were predominantly female (78%), slightly more likely to be aged 55+ but reasonably spread across other age cohorts. Education levels were predictably low – 62% had no or only primary schooling. While 49% rejected the efficacy of politics, on a more positive note, alienation and anomie were evident but lower than expected, suggesting that these 'ultra-poor' respondents would take up opportunities – if only those opportunities would penetrate the deep rural locales where they are most likely to be resident.

Even this very basic analysis shows that proper targeting will facilitate specific interventions that know who they want to reach, why, and with what services and opportunities. This is critical in place of the current 'spray-and-pray' approach to both targeting and delivery.

## **Conclusion**

Poverty remains a critical threat facing the future of democratic South Africa. But unlike the early forays into understanding and measuring poverty, South Africa – or its government and sections of its ruling party, anyway – seems to be moving away from empathy and consensus around the need for massive state intervention, and a more severe, judgemental attitude seems to be spreading.

Part of this derives from government's failure to move beyond moral exhortations to properly disaggregate the poor and target accordingly. Rather, massive resources have been thrown at infrastructure provision, service delivery, social grants, public works and so on, with no real appreciation of who – precisely – should be targeted, and with what kind of intervention, programme or support.

The result is that levels of poverty have slowly declined, but remain appallingly high. Decent targeting is a relatively straightforward exercise, and would facilitate far greater impact in the 'war on poverty'. Without it, the poorest citizens – female, rural, low educated, with negative social attitudes – will continue to occupy two simultaneous positions: the most 'deserving' in the eyes of many, and undeserving in the eyes of the state.

## **Appendix A: Poverty matrix**

A poverty matrix was constructed based on variables included in the censuses of both 1996 and 2001. The variables in the matrix include both household and individual-level data, and include the following:

- Female-headed households
- Illiteracy (the proportion of population aged 15 and above who have not completed Std 5/Grade 7)
- Rate of unemployment
- Household income (the proportion of households with no annual income)
- Crowding (the proportion of households sharing a room with at least one other household)
- Dwelling type (households classified informal or traditional)
- Sanitation (households without flush or chemical toilet)
- Water (households without tap water inside dwelling or on site)
- Electricity (households without electricity for lighting purposes)
- Refuse removal (households whose refuse is not removed by local authority)

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