

6. Priority areas for research

This study has sought to bring together what is known about chronic poverty in South Africa, in part by summarising the small but important literature that addresses chronic poverty directly, and in part by selectively drawing together other strands of the literature on poverty. The study has also aimed to provide an overview of anti-poverty measures of government and civil society, and to speculate on whether and in what way these may be having an impact on the chronically poor.

Despite the wealth of information about poverty in South Africa, much remains to be learned about chronic poverty specifically, and still more remains to be learned before we can say with certitude how particular attention to chronic poverty might figure in a coherent, over-arching anti-poverty strategy. We conclude this paper by means of identifying themes and research topics that, on the basis of earlier sections, would appear to be priority areas for a longer-term research programme on chronic poverty.

- *Dynamic aspects of multiple livelihood strategies* - This is arguably the integrating, overarching theme of the entire research programme. To the extent poor households seek to survive and, where possible, to improve their circumstances by tapping into different sources of sustenance, how do these strategies evolve over time? A key aspect of this theme is to track changes in assets and entitlements over time, as well as household composition, and to understand the reasons for changes.
- *Role of social security grants* - Social security grants are recognised as vital to keep individuals and households from falling into total destitution, but they are also controversial in that they can allegedly create dependency and inhibit initiative - thus maintaining chronic poverty. Economic theory provides no guidance on the matter. A number of factors could be examined, including the size of grants, the household member to whom they are allocated, the effects on household composition over time, whether the grants provide a source of investment, and their role in the economy of the local community.
- *Access to and effects of government and civil society programmes* - Most communities are touched by at least some initiatives introduced to promote development or expand economic opportunities. They may originate with the community, or they may be introduced from outside. Among the key issues that must be addressed are who in the community becomes included in these initiatives, what governs this process, and how the included and the not-included are impacted.
- *The impact of government-funded income generation projects* - One of the government's most significant anti-poverty interventions is the financing of income generation projects. To date, a number of in-house evaluations have been done of these projects, but these are not generally publicly available, nor has there been a summary or comparison of these various evaluations, the better to understand the impact of government's spending in this important area. Assembling lessons learned to date, with particular reference to issues such as targeting, might provide a valuable resource to the development community generally.

- *Role of land, tenure patterns, and agriculture* - Land access forms a critical part of households' livelihood strategies for those who have it. However, land access is also vulnerable to changes over time, and the benefits themselves are also susceptible to vagaries of weather, theft, etc. A key policy issue that could be directly addressed within this research programme is whether and in what way land access benefits households whose land use is of a part-time or subsistence nature. The trend among provincial departments of agriculture, for instance, to assume that these forms of land use are inappropriate or maintain households in poverty, must be examined up close. At the same time, households with more than the average amount of agricultural land can also be studied, not least to assess their role in stimulating the local economy, which itself forms a key tenet of the new Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy.
- *Dislocation, internal migration, and social capital* - Social exclusion has been highlighted as an important factor that can contribute to poverty and to an inability to seize opportunities to escape poverty. Different factors may contribute to social exclusion, but there is scope for improving our understanding of how these may arise and change over time. Bekker *et al.* (1992) stress that former farm workers in particular are susceptible to chronic poverty, because following retrenchment they typically must resettle somewhere where they have no social network on which to rely in times of stress. The continued decline of employment in this important sector over the past two decades, has meant that this describes a large number of rural people, especially those in rural townships and nearby squatter settlements. One important research question is what these households do, if anything, to compensate for the lack of such networks. Another question is whether and to what extent such networks can be built or re-built over time, and how this is done. A third question of immediate concern, is what avenues of re-deployment have been discovered by retrenched farm workers, and to what effect?
- *The effect of HIV/AIDS on households and communities* - What is the effect of HIV/AIDS on household structure, household welfare, internal migration, and social support networks? The present research programme offers an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the implications of AIDS for poverty traps in the South African context, potentially with critical lessons for policy.
- *Extrapolating to the question of inter-generational poverty* - Despite the limited timeframe of the research programme, it offers an opportunity to examine the inter-generational aspect of poverty. One possible approach to this issue is to examine households' attention to investing in the future of their children. What conscious strategies are adopted so as to promote the chances that a child born to a poor household will have an opportunity for a better future? What sacrifices are made, and according to what expectations? What are the prospects for these strategies being successful?
- *The political economy of poverty and development policy in South Africa* - Especially since 1994, what has governed the evolution of South Africa's approach to addressing poverty? What is responsible for the trend towards 'developmental welfare', and away from grants and towards work-related remuneration? What informs the balance struck between attention to urban versus rural areas? And what is the relationship between the public promises of government, and the means put into place to realise them?