

# POVERTY AND INEQUALITY PROFILE OF HOUSEHOLDS IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA

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*The paper gives an overview of the socio-economic profile of access to resources and social behaviour of rural households of the Northern Province of South Africa. It is based on the survey conducted in 24 villages covering 586 households. The preliminary results reflect a number of disparities among men and female household heads and their occupations. Women farmers tend to dominate the agricultural sector, while men are predominantly in the service and industry sectors. Also, male headed households have more members than female headed households, which are mostly single parents and have higher percentage of members under fifteen (reflecting high fertility rates). Unemployment is rife, coupled with a significant number of old (retired) people, and more women involved in subsistence agriculture. Migration is prevalent, and is a source of support for households to supplement their livelihood, since farming is not enough to meet household requirements. There is still a gap in access to water and land resources. These results pose major challenges for agriculture in the new millennium since access and distribution of resources will be imminent.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The fertility and migration behaviour and decisions of household in arid and semi-arid areas of the developing world are said to respond to the distribution of rural resources. The impact of the resultant demographic patterns is known to affect land and water use and thus sustainability of small-scale dry land farming. The issue of rural inequality and its demographic effect has been of interest among social scientists and economists of different countries of the world since the 1970s and 1980s<sup>1</sup>. The prevalence of rural inequality in Africa and the rest of the developing world is, therefore, no longer a debate but an accepted fact. The purpose of this study is to find out how rural households in dry lands of South Africa, with access to different amounts of productive assets differ in their fertility and migration behaviour.

### 1.1 The study area

The study covers eight sub-regions of the Northern Province, namely, Porgietersrus, Nebo, Seshego, Bochum, Sekgosese, Sekhukuneland, Letaba

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and Mokerong. This choice was guided by the prevalence of arid and semi-arid lands and a big small-scale farming sector. 24 villages were surveyed, and were selected from the rural and deep rural villages of the province.

## 1.2 Research procedure

Three of the villages were pre-selected and extensively surveyed, by sampling 75 households. In the remaining 21 villages stratified sampling was used in view of the scattered nature of the former homelands and the villages therein. 17-18 households were selected from each village. As far as possible, sampling was confined to villages where agriculture, including animal husbandry, is widely practised, but the sample did not exclude households that do not have agricultural assets.

Two structured questionnaires were administered on household and village samples, respectively. With the former, we collected information on household characteristics, household income and infrastructures, land, environmental issues, migration, fertility, contraception, autonomy of women in the household and their perceived value of children. The household head or his/her deputy responded to a major part of the questionnaire. With the latter, we collected general demographic, economic and agriculture information at the village level.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The distribution of resources, income and wealth in South Africa is among the most unequal in the world. The land holdings, other assets and the opportunities to generate a sustainable livelihood are all unequally distributed. In *per capita* terms South Africa is an upper - middle-income country, but most South African households, especially in the rural areas, experience outright poverty or vulnerability to being poor. Many households still have unsatisfactory access to clean water energy, health and education.

A number of authors have highlighted the relationship between, for example, landholding and fertility in rural areas. Schutjer and Stokes (1980, 1982, and 1983) looked at the relationships of land, tenancy, and fertility for the design of agricultural and rural development policies. They argue that the size of operational holdings has a positive correlation on fertility, while the size of ownership holding has a negative correlation on fertility. Maglad, (1994) documented similar findings in his study of Fertility in Rural Sudan. He also found out that while access to land use is positively related to fertility, access to ownership to land has a negative effect. DeVanny and Sanchez (1977)

analysed the effect of land reform on fertility in rural Mexico. They concluded that the institutional structure of Mexico's land reform program, at that time, encouraged fertility, as children functioned as future securities to their parents. However, an increase in the survival rate of children reduced fertility.

Studies of a similar nature, addressing inequalities in the rural areas of South Africa are few and fairly recent<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, such studies have not looked at the interrelationship between inequality, demography and their effect on agriculture. May (1987) concentrated on the social dynamics of differentiation and inequality in the former homeland of KwaZulu-Natal. Fairlamb (1990), on the other hand, studied the influence of economic factors on human fertility behaviour amongst households in KwaZulu-Natal, but did not look into issues of inequality.

Available literature, mainly from the Asian experiences<sup>3</sup>, indicates a movement away from seeing migration in terms of a sign of crisis (such as a rural-urban transition) towards seeing it as an integral part of societies and household strategies and a social process. At the same time, migration is not seen as an individual action, but a family strategy for survival. A study carried out by Cross, *et al* (1998) on the Eastern Seaboard focusing on KwaZulu-Natal does not link rural inequality and migration *per se*, even though it alludes to land related factors influencing the migration flow.

### The concept of inequality

According to May (1998) "inequality" is defined as the state of social organisation, which gives unequal access to resources and opportunities to its members. The analysis of the functional distribution of income and factor shares for production has been one of the central issues in development economics. Ricardo's analysis predicted that inequalisation will progress in the process of economic growth. A half a century later, Marx predicted growing inequality in the capitalist development process. According to Kuznets, income inequality simply means differences in income. He suggested that in the early stage of economic growth the distribution of income tend to worsen, while at a latter stage it will improve. However, according to Todaro (1989), all nations of the world show some degree of inequality. He demonstrates the large disparities between incomes of the rich and the poor between and within nations.

In many developing countries, however, land and other rural assets are considered to be the primary source of rural inequality. This is especially true for countries whose rural populations depend on agriculture for livelihood.

South Africa is no exception, where ownership of land and associated assets was for decades the major source of economic and social inequality. There are exceptions in countries (such as Tanzania and Sudan), where access to land and water are publicly owned and their use equitably administered. Nevertheless, rural social and economic inequality still persists (Hassan *et al*, 1989). This paper presents preliminary descriptive results to provide a provincial level profile.

### **3. SOME INDICATIVE RESULTS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY**

From the preliminary analysis conducted on the data set that has been compiled from the survey, some characteristics are described. The discussion covers social and economic indicators, migration, livelihood issues as well as access to resource base.

#### **3.1 Some socio-economic characteristics**

About 328 (56%) households in the sample are headed by males while 248 (44%) are headed or managed<sup>4</sup> by females. The typical household had about seven members, though male-headed households had about 10 members on average. This is so since almost all households with male head will usually have a wife. Generally, men tend to remarry after divorce or after losing a spouse, while fewer women opt for second marriage after the death of the first spouse. More female heads of households tended to live as single parents. As such, more men are living under civil or customary marriage (91%), while more women heads of household live as single (14.2%) or widows (58%) not intending to remarry. Children under 15 years of age formed a greater percentage (39,5%) in the female-headed households, compared to 34,74 percent in the male-headed households.

An analysis of the main vocational status of the resident head of the household and their partners indicated that, in the month before the survey, the majority were either retired, unemployed and seeking for work or as housewives. The data further indicate that among those who are formally employed (22%), a high proportion of male households heads are in the service sector (37%) while females are concentrated in crop agricultural sector (35.7%); only 25.2% of men are involved in crop farming. Cattle-farming is a minor activity among both male and female household heads.

### 3.2 Migration issues

The household head gave three reasons why a member of his/ her household migrated; namely, for work (76.5%), for education reasons (11.7%) and for other reasons (11.7). In the majority of cases (80%), the type of migration involved was long term, where a member would leave the household to live somewhere else for some six to 10 months. Another common type of migration was the absence of a member for purposes of attending school away from home (7.2%). This pattern of migration was true for the four years considered in the survey (1995-1999).

There is mixed feeling among the household heads regarding the support that members who are non-resident give to the household. About 29% of households heads indicated a moderate support, 28.7% a frequent and large extent of support, 27.6% received no support and 14.3% rarely got support from their non-resident members. This is not surprising, considering the fact that some non-residents are absent for schooling reasons, while others may still be out there looking for jobs. About 85.1% of households that receive support from non-resident members use it mainly on food and to a lesser extent on clothes and other household requirement.

### 3.3 Household livelihood

Household food and income generated from what the resident members are able to do at the farm level, from both crops and livestock enterprises, is a good indicator of the poverty status of the populations. Only 1% of households harvested more than enough crops for food with a surplus for sale. The majority (57%) did not grow any staple food crops in the last twelve months prior to the survey. In between the two extremes 13.9% had less than a quarter of what they require for consumption, while 10.3% had more than half of their requirement. 45.5% of household did not have any food providing animals and only 34.8% had a regular, but small part of their diet composed of animal feed.

There is inadequate presence of safety nets, within the communities surveyed, for those who are not able to produce what they need. About 44.8% of household indicated that there is no one in the area, who can help them with meals, food, finding or giving job or loan if they run short of food or money. About 34% indicated relatives, 12.2% neighbours and 8.3% indicated other sources. Due to drought and climatic conditions 65.9% of households did not harvest any crops in 1999 and neither did they sell any livestock. A mere 5.6% of household reported better levels of income for 1999 than the previous year.

### 3.4 Access to resource base

#### 3.4.1 Water for household use

About 50.8% households reported having own tap connection for household supply of water, in addition, 27.8% had access to a water supply outside their household but less than 100m away. Only 14.9% of households had to access water more than 100m away but less than 500m.

#### 3.4.2 Access to farm land and water

About 58.9% of households have access to some form of land, which they can use, either for grazing livestock or for crop production. Out of those households who have access to land 75.1% do not have any source of ground water for crops or livestock production, 11.2% have access to a bore hole while another 11.2% have access of dug wells. Only 2.1% of households have access to more than one source of ground water.

This indicates how critical farm water is as resource for farm production. The majority of those with access to ground water, 74%, reported that the access of such water is less and deeper than five years ago. Only 2.9% of households with access to ground water have always used surface irrigation water while 75.8% have never used it. Nevertheless, 19.8% used surface irrigation to irrigate most of their crops. Given the drought incidences in the past, it was not surprising that 67% of farmers accessing farm water reported that such water was less adequate in 1999 than five years ago.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary results suggest a high rate of unemployment among heads of households and their partners in the Northern Province, which is also coupled with a significant number of old (retired) people. There are disparities among men and female household heads and their occupations. Women farmers tend to dominate the agricultural sector, while men are predominantly in the service and industry sectors. As such, there is a need to consider gender perspectives in designing policies that will drive agriculture and other job creation ventures in this new millennium.

Although we are not, at this stage, in a position to indicate percentage of households with non-residents, patterns of migration were observed; for example, long-term migration is predominant followed by school attendance migration. Households' support from non-residents is very important,

indicating dependence on remittances. As a follow up step, we hope to establish how such migration patterns affect investment and practices in agriculture.

There is a very unsatisfactorily low proportion of households getting adequate livelihood from agriculture, with only 1% of the households getting more than enough for home consumption and a surplus to sell. At the same time, there are inadequate food security safety nets, reflecting household food insecurity among the majority of the households surveyed. This state of affairs could be emanating from the dry conditions, which affected the province during the past five years before the survey. However, lack of agricultural development could, to some extent, also be associated to inadequate access to water and land resources for farming. Therefore land reform and water management policies should cater for productive capacities of the rural poor.

## NOTES

1. *The list is long, but includes: Aghjanian, A. (1978); Cain, M. (1985); Chalamwong, Y., Nelson, M.R. & Schutjer (1979); DeVany, A. & Sanchez, N. (1977); Driver, E. (1963); Hassan, R.M., Fletcher, L.B. & Ahmed, S. (1989); Hiday, V.A. (1978); Julka, A.C. & Soni, R.N. (1988); Lanjouw, P. & Stern, N. (1989); Lipton, M. (1980) and May, J. (1997), just to mention a few.*
2. *Popular rural inequality authors include Fairlamb, C.D. (1990); De Wet, C. (1995), May, J. (Ed). (1998) and Cross, et al (1998)*
3. *De Haan, A. (1997); and others.*
4. *In households where the male head is absent the female partner acts as head on his behalf.*

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