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POVERTY AND STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT: THE AFRICAN CASE

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Abstract

Structural adjustment programs restructure the productive capacities of a country in order to increase efficiency and to restore growth. In Sub-Saharan Africa, there is widespread poverty, fragile resources, high population growth rates and low economic growth rates. The high population growth rate stresses the natural resource base and taxes the governments' already limited financial and institutional capacity to provide essential social services. Implementation of basic adjustment reforms is clearly essential to restore growth, and further acceleration in growth is needed to reduce the number of the poor.

Roughly 80-90 percent of the poor in Africa live in rural areas and consist of self-employed agricultural households. Adjustment programs that focus on broad-based growth in agriculture offer the most immediate opportunity for alleviating poverty and promoting economic growth. Growth must be accompanied by human capital formation, the upgrading of skills and improved delivery and access to social services. Spending in the social sectors during adjustment has not decreased, however, the reallocation of those funds towards the subsectors which most benefit the poor (primary education, basic health, etc.) is clearly required.

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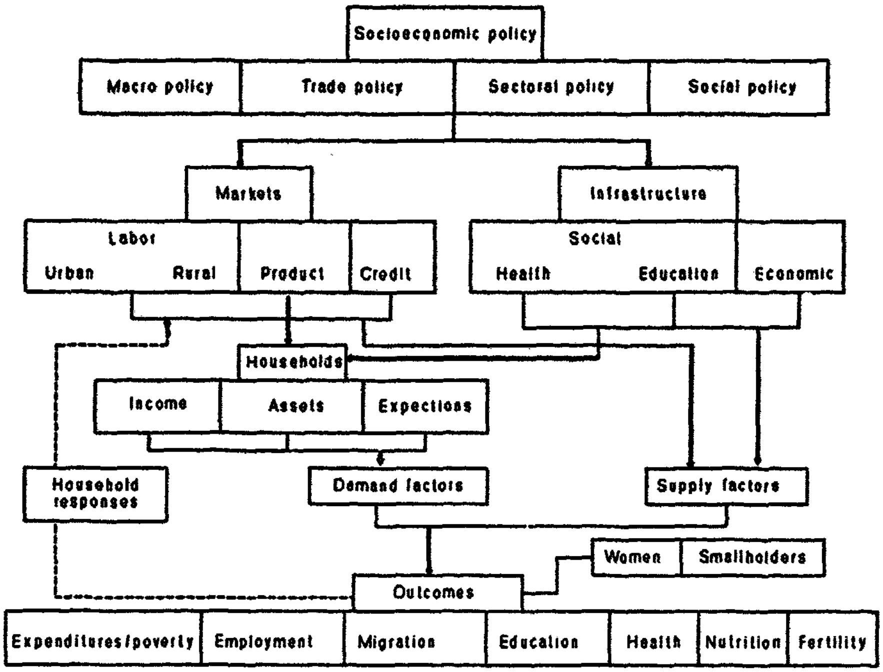
INTRODUCTION

Structural adjustment programs are aimed at restructuring the productive capacities in order to increase efficiency and to restore growth. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the policy instruments most frequently used to achieve this objective have included i) realistic exchange rate, ii) improved agriculture producer incentives, iii) foreign trade liberalization, iv) domestic market deregulation and price de-controls, v) public sector efficiency improvement, and vi) financial sector restructuring.

Any attempt by a government to restructure significant portions of its economy will be accompanied by significant changes in social conditions. Criticisms have been leveled at structural adjustment programs in SSA based on the belief that their impact has been inordinately destructive to the poor (Oxfam 1993). These criticisms call for the end of adjustment in the area.

The effects of an adjustment program on the poor are certain to be complex and difficult to analyze. This derives in part because an adjustment program usually involves changes in a number of policy instruments and each instrument may have conflicting effects, but also because of differences in the characteristics of poor households. Figure 1 (taken from Demery et al. 1993) illustrates the complexity of this process. Policies affect the welfare of the poor through two main "mesoeconomic" channels: markets and infrastructure. The former includes both factor and product markets, and both formal and informal segments. The latter covers both social and economic infrastructure. Whether poor households benefit or not from a package of policy reforms depends on the net effect of these processes. In general, adjustment policies have had favorable market effects for most of the poor in Africa (the exceptions being possibly the urban poor). The infrastructural effects are less certain.

Figure 1 Macro-meso-micro analysis



A hierarchical information system for the social dimensions of adjustment

(1) Level	(2) Focus	(3) Analysis	(4) Constructs	(5) Data
Macro	*Policy* •Monetary, fiscal, and exchange rate policy	•Macroeconomic models -aggregate (RMSM) -multisectoral (CGE)	•National accounts •Social accounting matrix •Consumer price index •Balance of payments •Macro-indicators	•Economic, trade, and financial statistics •Social and demographic statistics
Meso	*Effects* •Markets •Economic and social infra-structure	•Sectoral and institutional studies •CGE •Multimarket models	•Social accounting matrix •Food balance sheets •Sectoral quantity and price indices	•Community survey •Price statistics •Production statistics
Micro	*Impact* •Individual and household welfare	•Household models and analysis	•Poverty profiles •Social indicators	•Household surveys -economic -social -anthropometric -demographic

Source: Demery, L., M. Ferroni, and C. Grootaert, eds. 1993. *Understanding the Social Effects of Policy Reform*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT IN AFRICA

Structural adjustment programs were initiated in the SSA region about a decade ago. After much discussion and debate, they were adopted by a majority of the countries only in the second half of the 1980s. Since then, much experience has been gained which can be used to provide an objective assessment of these programs. There is by no means unanimity on the impact of adjustment programs and there is a lack of clear understanding of the expectations about what adjustment was meant to achieve in SSA. The confusion has been further aggravated by the failure to isolate the effects of initial conditions, external shock and policy changes.

It should be recognized that the performance of SSA countries, even at the best of times in the recent history, has not been spectacular. Table 1 illustrates that SSA as a region has always lagged behind the developing countries as a group, including during the 1960s and 1970s. The only difference in the 1980s has been that the population growth rate was higher and averaged 3.1 percent annually compared with 2.7 percent in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, it should not be expected that SSA, with deep-rooted structural deficiencies, weak institutions, inadequate physical infrastructure and an undeveloped human resource base would be able to perform better than the developing countries as a whole. The expectations about Africa's growth should be realistic and modest. In the last three years, developing countries as a group have had stagnant or negative per capita income growth, and this fact should be taken into consideration when assessing SSA's performance.

TABLE 1
GDP GROWTH RATE PER CAPITA
(Annual Average Percent Change)

	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990	1991	1992
Developing Countries	4.2	2.6	1.5	-0.5	-1.7	-1.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.7	0.6	-1.1	-1.7	-1.4	-0.4

SSA is quite integrated into the world economy[1] and, although its share in international trade has declined over time, most of the commodities it produces (petroleum, beverages and minerals) are consumed primarily in the OECD countries. Thus, the economic conditions in those countries, e.g., the growth in income and demand, the relative prices, etc., have a disproportionately large influence on what happens to SSA. A deep and long recession in the world economy will have serious negative repercussions despite the best policy efforts of African countries. The terms of trade for SSA have cumulatively declined as well.

While desirable economic policy changes were beginning to gain acceptance and take root in many of the African countries, the incipient political transition process has either caused a temporary hiatus in economic policy changes or ignited short-run disruption in the level and intensity of economic activity. The situation varies considerably among countries and while, in the long run, political pluralism is expected to promote better economic governance, an assessment of short-run economic performance will often show up the negative results of the political transition.

[1] Export/GDP ratio of SSA is 31 percent compared with 21 percent for developing countries as a group, 28 percent for East Asia and 14 percent for Latin America. Net resource flows from external sources are 5 percent of GDP for SSA compared with 1.7 percent for South Asia, 0.7 percent for East Asia and 0.4 percent for Latin America.

The reduction of poverty is one of the fundamental issues in economic development. This is especially difficult in SSA because of the fragile resources, high population growth rates and low economic growth rates. Adjustment programs have increased growth in some of the countries where they have been effectively implemented, but overall the number of poor continues to grow throughout the region, even in countries with strong adjustment programs.

Countries with widespread poverty and weak institutions need broad-based economic reforms and investments in basic social services. The returns to expenditures on basic social services are higher than expenditures targeted to the poor through food or fertilizer subsidies.

This paper presents an overview of the effects of adjustment in terms of poverty reduction and access to essential social services. It looks at the distribution of the poor in the regions, the impact of adjustment on growth, and the expenditures in the social sectors during adjustment.

POVERTY PROFILE

To analyze the situation of the poor in SSA, it would be necessary to have household survey data both before and after adjustment. Such data are rare and are only lately being collected throughout the region. However, using the household surveys that have recently been completed and supplementing them with partial or anecdotal data pertaining to a few other countries it is possible to draw some generalizations. Strong conclusions cannot be drawn from these studies, but they do give some broad sense of the order of magnitude involved. The household surveys which are being undertaken in 21 African countries will provide better information in a few years.

On the basis of these surveys and studies it is possible to assemble some stylized facts about the number, location and characteristics of the poor in Africa. These facts are not applicable to each and every African country but are representative of the average tendencies.

- The poor in Africa are heavily concentrated in rural areas and consist of small-holders. In Côte d'Ivoire about 80 percent of the country's poor are in the rural areas; in Ghana 80 percent; in Madagascar 92 percent; and in Malawi 99 percent.
- Self-employed agriculture income is the most important source of income. Off-farm incomes and wage earnings are less important than in other developing regions.
- A large share of agriculture income is the imputed value of food produced and consumed by the households themselves.
- Agriculture sales consist mainly of export crops. For example, 80 percent of the poor in Côte d'Ivoire living in Savannah produce export crops.
- The incomes and consumption level of low wage earners in the urban areas are much higher than those of the self-employed agricultural workers in the rural areas.

These facts lead to the following conclusions: the majority of the poor live in rural areas, draw their main source of income from self-employed agriculture production, consume self-produced food and sell export crops for cash income. The urban poor consist mainly of the self-employed informal sector workers and minimum wage earners but their proportion in the total number of poor ranges between 4 and 20 percent.

ADJUSTMENT, RELATIVE PRICE CHANGES AND GROWTH

Empirical evidence clearly shows that growth that makes greater use of the factors of production owned by the poor -- principally, land and labor -- can have a significant effect on poverty. If the pattern of growth is highly capital intensive and import intensive, as was the case previously with African countries, higher growth will not have much impact on poverty. Therefore, the choice of instruments for promoting growth and ensuring free mobility of factors, particularly labor, are important considerations in the design of adjustment programs. Ineffective capital markets inhibit employment growth, and institutional or regulatory barriers constrain the poor's access to labor and product markets. Attempts to reform the financial sector and remove these barriers are certainly going to help the poor.

Because the majority of Africans -- and the majority of Africa's poor -- live in rural areas and are self-employed smallholders, adjustment programs that move the terms of trade in favor of the rural sector and focus on broad-based growth in agriculture offer the most immediate opportunity for alleviating poverty and promoting economic growth. Agricultural growth, and the resulting increase in the purchasing power of rural Africans, is the engine of growth for manufacturing and services -- activities which must expand if Africans are to enjoy a much wider range of economic choices than is now conceivable. Earlier strategies neglected agriculture, a sector in which Africa has a clear comparative advantage. Agriculture currently provides 33 percent of Africa's GDP, 40 percent of its exports and 70 percent of its labor force. Even when full account is taken of the environmental limits to land exploitation, the scope for expanding production through increased productivity is great. Rising agricultural and rural incomes through a doubling of agriculture growth rate form the mainstay of adjustment programs, and thereby offer significant promise for poverty reduction.

Prior to adjustment, biases against agriculture were extreme -- in the form of direct taxes and the effects of overvalued exchange rates and industrial protection. Well-intentioned efforts to provide farmers with services through public sector input supply and marketing institutions commonly went to waste because the institutions concerned were hopelessly inefficient. When low growth turned into full-scale crisis in the early 1980s, many governments responded by increasing the rationing of foreign exchange and domestic goods which slowed growth and hurt the poor. In Tanzania, for example, the bulk of what little foreign exchange was available was allocated to extraordinarily inefficient industries, while most basic consumer goods became unavailable in rural areas.

Prior to reform, the poor in countries like Mozambique or Tanzania often received the worst of both worlds, purchasing goods at high parallel market prices, while selling their agricultural produce at depressed official prices. Fertilizer subsidies benefitted large farmers and foreign exchange controls rewarded well-connected bankers, industrialists and bureaucrats. Devaluation, liberalization of agricultural marketing, higher producer prices, lower taxation of agriculture and increased output response have tended to raise the incomes of the rural poor. While there is evidence that adjustment policies of this type have generally helped the rural poor, the urban poor may have suffered in some cases as a result of increases in producer prices of food and the removal of consumer subsidies. Country studies have shown, however, that food prices in urban areas had often already adjusted to higher parallel market prices, and subsidized food at official or rationed prices was available only to the well-connected segments -- civil servants, army, etc. Besides, where adjustment has been consistently pursued and growth is being restored, as in Ghana, urban wages have begun to recover as well.

The aim of policy reform in Africa has been to redress these past biases. Depreciating real exchange rates and liberalizing external and internal trade both raise the prices of tradeable agricultural goods. Cocoa farmers in Ghana and Nigeria experienced a doubling or more of the purchasing power of their crops because of exchange rate depreciation and rises in the share of the final price they received. Rural dwellers in Tanzania discovered that they could again have access to consumer goods, and they responded by increasing agricultural supply. A severe lack of data makes a firm assessment impossible, but the combination of a recovery in growth and the removal of some of the worst anti-rural biases helped many of the poor.

Experience to date also shows the difficulties entailed in tackling Africa's agricultural problems. In some countries, failure to implement policies that build the competitiveness of exports has contributed to a squeeze on tradeables that has hurt agricultural producers. In other countries, producer prices for exports have stagnated or fallen despite price reforms, reflecting trends in international commodity prices. In others, economy-wide reforms need to be complemented by a far-reaching reform of marketing. While successes in Ghana and Nigeria were partly due to marketing reform, in Tanzania delays in implementing marketing reforms for some export crops caused delays in passing on benefits to producers. In Malawi, until recently, restrictions were placed on the production of profitable export crops by small farmers. These restrictions have since been removed and an increasing number of smallholders are being given licenses to take their products directly to the auction floor.

In the food crop sector, the liberalization of prices and marketing has contributed to an increase in food production. Per capita food production has held steady in the latter half of the 1980s after a fall in the first half. This has helped to limit food imports in many countries; overall, cereal imports in the late 1980s were 8 percent lower than in the early 1980s and food aid has been halved to 2.5 million tons from 4.8 million tons. Food prices show no overall trend in real terms, and increased domestic food production may have contributed to income gains by net producers. Stable food prices help those among the poor who are net purchasers of food.

Adjustment by itself is not enough to bring about significant changes that will benefit the rural poor. Investing in rural roads, developing research and extension services, and developing private services are equally important for broad-based rural development. This will take time and different kinds of government action.

Togo: Assessing the Impact of Agricultural Policy Reform

The main benefits for the poor from high export crop prices have arisen from better cotton prices. Some 32 percent of total production comes from the country's two poorest regions where poor farmers grow cotton alongside food crops. In addition, the terms of trade have moved in favor of food producers since 1981. Examining anthropometric data collected by NGOs engaged in food supplementation across the country shows that rural malnutrition has declined in the 1980s, with falls in the poorest regions. Piecing together the evidence therefore suggests that agricultural reform has had favorable impacts on the rural poor, although for the very poorest -- who rely on subsistence food-production and have no marketable surpluses -- there has been little change one way or the other. Improving the productive assets of the poor, and their productivity, could do much to spread further the benefits of price reforms.

Source: *Poverty Profile of Togo, Country Assessment and Policy Issues,* Report No. 7825-TO (April 1989).

ADJUSTMENT AND THE SOCIAL SECTORS

It is equally clear that higher growth by itself, even of the type that increases the incomes of the poor through reallocation of resources and increased return on assets they hold, is not sustainable unless human capital formation, the upgrading of skills and access to social services, are placed on equal footing with income augmentation processes. Recent empirical work strongly confirms that development in human resources is an excellent investment in terms of its contribution to sustainable economic growth. There is a strong, positive association, for example, between school enrollment and the average rates of growth. An educated population is the key to long-term growth. Education raises the output of farmers as educated farmers absorb new information quickly and are willing to innovate. Educated women have healthier and fewer children. Women's education also has environmental benefits because it reduces fertility, discourages forest clearing by insuring that women have better work options, and improves women's ability to manage natural resources. Similar findings show up in health, education, nutrition and family planning. Indeed, improvement in any one of these areas tends to raise economic returns in the others (see Psacharopoulos 1993).

Contrary to popular belief, the data show that the real levels of government expenditures for education and health increased in the adjusting countries with only a few exceptions. The trend shows an upward surge and a larger share of any increase in total spending being allocated to social sectors. But there are still serious questions whether the spending is adequately directed toward primary education, basic health, etc., the subsectors which benefit the poor most. In the course of the 1980s, the Bank has paid increasing attention to this issue, emphasizing improved social service delivery and the protection of education and health spending, especially at the primary levels. A third of adjustment loans involved conditional social sector spending in 1989-90, up sharply from only 7 percent in the first half of the decade.

Despite the crisis, the social indicators in SSA have continued to improve as can be seen in Table 2. The period 1985-91, i.e., the adjustment period in most African countries, does not show a reversal of this trend. And this improvement cuts across all groups of countries. Even the countries with civil wars and social unrest have seen an increase in life expectancy and a decline in infant mortality. Nineteen countries have reduced infant mortality rates to below 100 in 1991 compared to only seven a decade ago.

TABLE 2
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
SOCIAL INDICATORS

	1973	1985	1991
Life Expectancy at Birth	45.1	49.3	50.8
Infant Mortality Rate	137	118	107
Adult Literacy Rate			
Male	37	56	62
Female	11	33	39
Female Primary Enrollment	38	43	45
Calorie intake per capita	2067	2097	2117

Social Sector Expenditures

The data do not show major cuts in the share of expenditure allocated to health and education, but they do show continuing major misallocations in the social spending -- misallocations that work against the poor. Trends in public spending do not tell the full story, however, because the private sector provides many social services. And it could be misleading to make inferences about the delivery of basic services from aggregate spending. The Côte d'Ivoire household survey data showed that when incomes dropped due to the deteriorating economy, the poor were forced to cut their spending on education and health care. Parents could not afford to pay the ancillary expenditures even though there was no cut in public services. Furthermore, there might also be regional differences in access within countries that do not show up in national level data. For example, the poor in remote regions may have little access to public services, illustrating the importance of monitoring households. Finally, the poor benefit from public spending on agriculture or infrastructure as well, so simply looking at social spending does not tell the whole story. One problem: we do not have disaggregated data on budgetary expenditure that would enable a detailed analysis of public expenditure and its impact on the poor.

Source: *Adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Progress, Payoffs, and Challenges.* Policy Research Department. Policy Research Report No. 2. Working Draft (May 1993).

CONCLUSION

The conventional wisdom that the poor in Africa have suffered under structural adjustment programs is not substantiated by the review of empirical evidence. As most of the poor live in rural areas, the shift in rural terms of trade has helped augment the incomes of the poor. Public expenditures on social services have also not taken a major cut in most adjusting countries. However, reallocation within these sectors is clearly warranted in most adjusting countries so that spending is aimed at increasing expenditures on primary education, basic health, etc. In the short run, the impact of adjustment policies depends on whether the poor are net producers of tradable goods since these policies tend to raise relative prices, wages and employment for this group. It is, however, conceivable that many of the policies that benefit the poor may, in the short, be detrimental to the urban population that has been the beneficiary of past policies.

The major concerns about the adjustment programs in Africa are the continued trends of low overall investment levels, lack of private investment, low domestic savings ratios and increased dependence on foreign aid.

Even in adjusting countries which have done reasonably well in growth and exports, the domestic savings ratios have declined over time and aid dependence has increased. This continues to be true in almost all African countries. Public sector dissavings are the major source of declining national savings, and prudent fiscal policy will not only help macroeconomic stability but will also make available a larger flow of national savings for purposes of productive investment.

The reasons for lack of private investment are varied and not fully understood. Political instability and lack of confidence in governments are regarded as the ostensible culprits. Investors may perceive that the reforms have not yet been firmly rooted or private investment does not enjoy full commitment of the Government as an objective, and thus adopt a "wait and see" attitude. Some observers allude to the fact that there is not much organized private sector in these countries, or if it exists, is dominated by ethnic minorities. Finally, the risks to foreign investors in Africa are relatively high while the rewards are low.

It is also possible that the official statistics which the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the African governments use may be understating the role of informal and unorganized sector activities. In the adjustment period, there has been a buoyancy both in the investment, and level of economic activity in the informal sector. The "actual" growth and investment may be much higher than the recorded statistics show. This measurement factor may also be responsible for the pessimism about savings, investment, employment and growth in African Countries.

The challenge for the 1990s in Africa is to design and implement growth strategies that help increase returns to the assets owned by the poor and raise levels of social expenditures that benefit them.

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