

Subsisting in the subsahara

crisis. One indicator of the balance of payments problem is the rise in external indebtedness: from \$US6 billion in 1970 to \$US32 billion by 1979.

Africa's economic prospects for the 1980s remain dim. The World Bank in its *World Development Report, 1981*, projects virtually no growth in per capita income in this region — and this even under its more *optimistic* assumptions about world economic recovery!

Poverty and inequality

Given this widespread economic stagnation, one would not expect the level of absolute poverty to have declined significantly over the past two decades. Existing studies suggest that it has not done so. Yet economic stagnation is only part of the explanation. Some countries, such as Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria, have achieved periods of robust economic growth with little relief in material deprivation.

Regardless of the indicators adopted, poverty is the major social problem in Tropical Africa. The World Bank,

the Third World. By 1980, 63 percent of the relevant age group attended primary school in Tropical Africa, a doubling of the proportion in twenty years. The field of health care has also demonstrated substantial progress. The current life expectancy of forty-seven years is low in world terms, but high when compared to the life expectancy of thirty-nine years which obtained in 1960.

Yet one must also address the questions of access to these services and their contextual appropriateness. African educational systems are generally oriented to the interests and needs of that small *minority* who eventually find employment in the modern, largely urban, sector. Most health-care budgets favor costly, Western-style curative facilities, located in the cities, at the expense of preventive and primary health care which focuses on the poor rural majority. Also, these facilities are unequally distributed, severely limiting the access of those in the more backward regions. Some governments, notably that in Tanzania, however, have genuinely attempted to equalize access to social services.

Gaps that hurt

Income distribution is another facet of social inequality. Although the data are scarce and suspect, the fact of vast inequalities is palpable in many Subsaharan countries. Studies suggest that income distribution in countries such as Gabon, Kenya, Zambia and Swaziland is among the most unequal in the world. In such other countries as Ghana and Nigeria, the concentration of income is less extreme, though still excessive. The top 20 percent of the population generally appropriates 60 percent or more of the national income. Growing income inequality is, however, common in the early and middle stages of economic development. Courageous egalitarian policies in such countries as Tanzania and Mozambique have successfully counteracted this trend.

There is also a ubiquitous rural-urban gap in mean incomes, with evident implication for population movements. This gap derives from the location in the cities of most of the desirable jobs in government and the modern sector, and most of the lucrative opportunities in commerce, real estate and industry. As well, people are drawn to the urban areas by the higher quality and greater range of services available there than in the countryside. The combination of urban bias in public and private investment with stagnant or diminishing real incomes in small-scale agriculture engenders a rate of rural-urban migration best described as explosive (see Table 1). In the 1970s, Subsaharan urban areas as a whole grew at an annual rate of 7 percent, and the thirty-five major capitals expanded at rate of 8.5 percent. Many cities thus double their size every seven years. Whereas there were only three Subsaharan African cities of over 500,000 people in 1960, there are now twenty-eight.

Most urban dwellers are, of course, not well off. Indeed, the most extreme income inequality tends to be found in the largest cities. This is manifest to all who journey beyond the modern cores of African capitals. The coexistence at close quarters of the affluent residential areas with the squalid dilapidated "bidonvilles" (squatter settlements and slums), is striking. The *nouveaux riches* develop a pervasive fear of the poor, as they see 40 or 50 percent of a city's population subsisting in underserviced, unsanitary and overcrowded settlements. Their residence

Socio-Economic Data, Subsaharan Africa

	Low-income countries (24)	Middle-income oil importers (11)	Middle-income oil exporters (4)
Population (millions, mid-1979)	187.1	65.2	91.6
GNP per capita (\$US 1979)	239.0	532.0	669.0
Annual Growth Rates (%)			
GNP per capita, 1960-79	0.9	1.5	3.2
Agriculture, 1970-79	1.5	3.5	-0.3
Industry, 1970-79	1.5	3.5	10.6
Labor Force			
1960-70	2.0	2.3	1.7
1970-80	2.1	2.6	1.7
1980-2000	2.8	3.1	3.2
Urban Population			
1960-70	5.8	5.3	4.7
1970-80	6.5	6.2	4.8
Food Production per capita, 1977-79 (1969-71 = 100)	91.0	95.0	86.0

Source: World Bank, *World Development Report, 1981*, various tables.
Notes: Weighted averages are used.
Notes: "Low-income countries" are those with a per capita income of less than \$US370.
Notes: Six Subsaharan countries (all very small) are excluded owing to lack of data.

Table 1

the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labour Office and other bodies have all developed their own measures of absolute poverty. From their work, we know that 40 to 65 percent of the Subsaharan population is "poor," and that this proportion is unlikely to diminish much by the year 2000, unless major policy changes occur. Mass poverty means that life expectancy at forty-seven is the lowest in the world today, while death rates are the highest. One in five children still dies before his or her first birthday.

Africa's achievements in education and health care are not to be slighted, however. Total school enrollments have grown faster in Africa since 1960 than in any other region in