

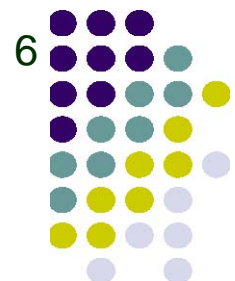


**WORKING NOTES ON  
INSTITUTIONAL SYNERGY &  
POVERTY REDUCTION**

**Edgar Pieterse**

**Dark Roast Occasional Paper Series**

No.  
(2001)  
Isandla  
Institute



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Published by:

Isandla Institute, PO Box 12263 Mill Street, Gardens, 8010 – Cape Town, SA. Email: [isandla@icon.co.za](mailto:isandla@icon.co.za)

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ISSN:

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# Working Notes on Institutional Synergy & Poverty Reduction

Edgar Pieterse<sup>1</sup>

Without transgression, without the red boundary, there is no danger, no risk, no *frisson*, no experiment, no discovery and no creativity. Without extending some hidden or visible frontier of the possible, without disturbing something of the incomplete order of things there is no challenge, no pleasure, and certainly no joy (Ben Okri 1997: 32).

## INTRODUCTION

Poverty and inequality is getting worse since 1994. This is despite a vast array of new, cutting edge development policy-making and experimentation within government and civil society. This is despite a range of explicit anti-poverty programmes and partnerships within and between government and civil society. This is despite a national level civil society focus on poverty eradication under the auspices of the War Against Poverty Campaign. Some of the explanations that are proffered suggest that the over-riding reason is the failure of government to dedicate sufficient resources for poverty reduction purposes. Others argue that the real reason for this dismal situation is the absence of a fully-fledged national anti-poverty strategy that envelops all government programmes. Radical political economy analysts suggest that increased poverty and inequality stems from macro economic policies that further exploit the poor and the unemployed in favour of attracting foreign direct investment (cf. Taylor 2000).

These are all partially valid but flawed explanations. The existing resources earmarked for poverty relief is frequently not fully spent as the many tales about rollover funds attest. The government does attempt to operate within a coordinated framework, manifested in the thematic clusters in Cabinet, but this has failed to translate into meaningful integration and coordination between social development departments mainly due to institutional resistance (Bornstein 2000; The Presidency 2001). Thirdly, macro-economic policies are critical but they do not account for the day-to-day decisions and actions of practitioners who do exercise control over (substantial) resources earmarked for development work. Comparatively speaking, if we combine the volume of overseas development aid resources, with a host of government programmes, internal development funds and the grants of ordinary citizens through their associational bodies, we cannot yet speak of a

<sup>1</sup> The research for this paper was conducted on the basis of resources contributed by the National Development Agency, SANGOCO and the CS Mott Foundation for various projects during 1999-2001. I am indebted Mirjam van Donk, Tiro Holele, Firoz Khan, Barbara Lipietz and Susan Parnell for support and comments in preparing this paper. Editorial comments from David Everatt have also strengthened the paper. These generous contributions are gratefully acknowledged but the author remains responsible for the views expressed. An amended version of the paper is published in *Development Update*, Vol 3(4).

shortage of resources at this stage. On the contrary, the numbers of functional NGOs and CBOs who work programmatically on poverty relief cannot absorb all of the resources.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I want to argue that the biggest developmental problem we face, at this point, is *institutional*. By this I mean most development organisations, whether private or public, are not very proficient in working towards a clearly defined purpose through programmes and projects that are consistent, conceptually, with the mission of the organisation. The problem is not being able to define a mission statement, but rather, defining a specific purpose rooted in a conceptual understanding about the nature of the problem being addressed, the broader political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental system it is located in, and how to systematically induce *systemic* change. Most development organisations tend to have very little explicit theory about how their discrete projects/interventions contribute to the progressive realisation of their over-arching purpose in this world. Here, I want to address the problem by exploring the institutional implications of working towards the objective of poverty eradication. I locate this discussion in the notion ‘integrated development’, which is very much in vogue in development circles at the moment, both in South Africa and internationally (SA Government 2000; World Bank 2000).

A critical premise of the overall argument is that our collective effectiveness as a development sector depends on our individual ability to act purposefully and consistently to achieve our respective missions. This means that development plans, programmes, projects and institutional arrangements must be defined in terms of an explicit development approach and strategy. To narrow it down, and given the broader focus on poverty eradication as the top priority within development work, I will focus on development strategy towards the eradication of poverty. This requires a clear statement about how one understands structural poverty, how it is reproduced, and how it can be eliminated through systematic interventions by a variety of development institutions within civil society, the state and the private sector.

This topic is potentially sprawling; to reign in the discussion I build on a number of propositions which serve as starting points. The document then explores different elements of a working development framework, viz.: the elements and salience of an ‘integrated development’ conceptual approach; the respective roles of different development institutions to realise integrated development that will lead to the eventual elimination of poverty.

## **STARTING POINTS**

The following conceptual starting points will be used as a foundation for exploring in greater detail what I mean by integrated development, the dimensions and institutional modalities of poverty eradication and drawing out operational implications for development institutions. The following points are not exhaustive but will suffice for the purpose of this paper:

<sup>2</sup> Significantly, both the National Development Agency and the Independent Development Trust have great difficulty to identify sufficient NGOs and CBOs that are organisationally effective and accountable to take-up the available grants for poverty relief projects.

☞ Poverty is multi-dimensional condition and can only be addressed through a combination of various interventions that are appropriately balanced and sequenced;

☞ The primary development actors that need to be strengthened are (democratic) community-based organisations who work to improve the living conditions amongst their members and their community;

☞ Other development actors such as NGOs, local government, private sector organisations and knowledge institutions have an enabling role to strengthen CBOs and members of poor households to exercise increasing access to opportunities, and control over decision-making. These, secondary institutions, especially NGOs are particularly important to focus on, and influence macro (economic and political) policy shifts that structures productive, supportive and political opportunities available to the poor. Ideally, there is a symbiotic relationship between work targeted at transforming macro conditions and community-level empowerment and capacity strengthening interventions (Fowler 1997);

☞ The most effective and sustainable framework to promote the role of CSOs in poverty eradication work is the community level development cycle/process. Scarce development resources must target initiatives and processes that foster healthy, effective, focussed and achievable community-level development processes. The primary purpose will be to foster strong and capable development institutions (especially CBOs), and also strategies to increase the asset-base of the poor and provide access to opportunity structures to improve *livelihood strategies*.<sup>3</sup>

I will now proceed to qualify these propositions. The first step will be to provide a definition of integrated development. Moving from this definition I will explore appropriate *development processes* to realise integrate development. As I alluded earlier, development processes are driven by *institutions* that pursue respective agendas, which are normally conflictual or contradictory. The challenge from an integrated development perspective is to forge coherence between these interests and agendas, as far as possible, which effectively means working to balance and sustain multiple tensions. In practice it means that if coherence is out of the question then explicit (political) contestation need to be encouraged and surfaced. Lastly, integrated development is incremental and must manifest in concrete *outcomes* of the development process as driven by development institutions.

## **DEFINING INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT IN TERMS OF POVERTY ERADICATION**

Integrated development is about people, balance and equity. Firstly, integrated development recognises that the most important task of development strategy is to create meaningful opportunities for people to empower themselves and pursue their interests to achieve *meaning* in the acts of economic production, realising political voice, expressing

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Ashley & Carney 1999).

cultural (re)production and attaining self-actualisation through self-selected systems of belief. Integrated development consciously identifies all types of barriers that prevent people from achieving their potential in these spheres of life and livelihood production.

Secondly, integrated development recognises the fundamental need for balance and inter-relationship between the economic, ecological and social systems of communities, as they are defined at various scales: local, sub-national, national, regional, global. In more popular lexicon it is referred to as the triple bottomline: economic vitality, social equity and environmental sustainability. Meaningful development processes recognises the contradictions between these systems, which result in imbalance and large-scale socio-economic and environmental crises, and seeks to resolve it by finding appropriate tradeoffs and balance through democratic political engagement.

Thirdly, this attempt to find balance is a *constant* process mediated through social institutions, which themselves are often unbalanced and unequal. The consequence of socio-political and economic systems that deny the right to empowerment and sustainable (balanced) development is inequity and inequality, which also manifest at various scales, ranging from inside households to the international system of nation states and the global system of economic production and trade. In short, my use of the term, integrated development, brings together the insights of the last decade about the importance of people-centred, culturally appropriate, rights-based and sustainable development (Friedmann 1992; Nederveen Pieterse 2001).

### **Poverty Dimension**

However, development practitioners in all sectors have come to acknowledge at the end of the 1990s that the biggest development challenge remains the continued increase of poverty and inequality in almost every corner of the South. So much so that most of the multilateral and bilateral development agencies have now focussed their priorities on the objective to eradicate poverty. The stage was set by the United National Social Summit in 1995, which identified the triple priorities for (national) development action: poverty eradication, full employment and social inclusion. This has translated into a spate of policies, investigations, participatory actions, toolkits and development indicators to deal with the intractable problem of poverty, especially in the hands of the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme (Maxwell 2001).<sup>4</sup>

It is arguable that this was a response to the painstaking activism of civil society organisations (CSOs) at international, national and local levels to highlight the plight of the poor and vulnerable, in the face of lop-sided development strategies of governments and multilateral agencies for much of the 1980-90s (Edwards 2000; Korten 1999). The emerging mainstream consensus in the international development community incorporates the following tenets: One, CSOs are recognised as crucial actors to facilitate the empowerment of poor people and communities through context-specific

<sup>4</sup> During 2000 both the UNDP and the World Bank released high profile development reports devoted to national and local poverty eradication strategies. The Department for International Development (DFID) in the United Kingdom used poverty eradication as their main priority of development policy. Most other bilateral agencies have followed suit in the last while. There is an agreement between the OECD countries and various multilateral institutions to work towards concrete poverty reduction targets for 2015.

participatory development interventions. Two, community-level empowerment is most effective if it unfolds *simultaneously* with national-level policy reforms to create a conducive context for democratic decentralisation, appropriate fiscal reform, adequate safety nets to support the destitute, and improved coordination between sectoral interventions, especially in terms of local-level impacts. Third, these micro and macro political changes must be buttressed by the entrenchment of the human rights which guarantee civil society formations the space to act autonomously and defend the interests of especially the marginal and vulnerable in society. Fourth, the state is once again recognised as a central player in the guise of the *developmental state* that intervenes, regulates and enables, as opposed to the neoliberal vision of the minimalist state that withdraws from social service provision. (The section below on institutions return to the theme of the developmental state.) Fifth, there is recognition that broad-based, balanced, labour-intensive economic growth is crucial to ensure access to productive opportunities for as many people as possible given the tendency to make large number of people economically redundant in a context of uncritical trade liberalisation and inequitable processes of globalisation (cf. UNDP 1999; World Bank 2000).

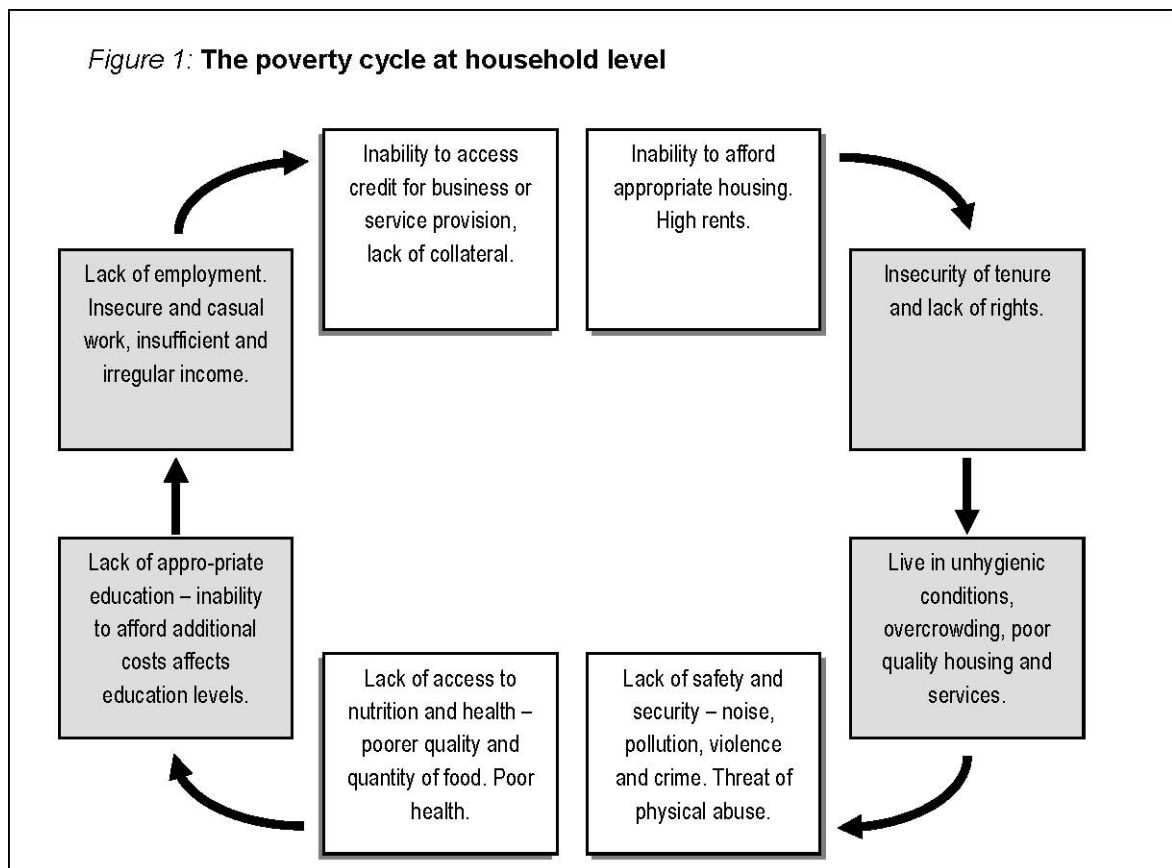
It would be an error to suggest that this is a conflict-free and unambiguous ‘new consensus’. On the contrary, we are at the threshold of a deeply conflictual and contested political era in development work, globally, nationally and locally, not least because strategies and tactics now travel much faster between these scales creating new political opportunities and fault-lines. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to unpack this emerging political terrain, suffice to say that the precise meanings and implicit strategies associated with ‘poverty reduction’, ‘community empowerment’, ‘developmental state’, ‘sustainable development’, and so forth, is by no means uncontested. As Simone Maxwell points out: “There is no model on offer which does not prescribe jobs, education, health, participation, environmental protection and a host of other ‘goods’. The discrimination therefore has to be more subtle: not ‘what’, but ‘why’, ‘what priority’, ‘what sequence’, and ‘what roles for different actors’ ” (Maxwell 2001: 143-4).

In the wake of this renewed emphasis on poverty (a comeback since the early 1970s ‘basic needs’ perspective), a wealth of policy and operational insights about appropriate anti-poverty action has emerged. The basic elements of this can be summarised as follows:

- ☒ Poverty is multi-dimensional and needs an integrated and co-ordinated response;
  - ☒ Poverty is not simply about a lack of income but involves a number of different dimensions that could either be present in full or partially (see figure 1 below);
  - ☒ Poverty is embedded in social relations of inequality and power, which accounts for the different experiences of poverty and the differential strategies required for different social groups, especially men and women, to transcend it;
  - ☒ Effective responses to poverty must be rooted in the experience and needs of the poor themselves, and as far as possible be driven by these groups to give practical content to the ideal of empowerment;
  - ☒ The reproduction of poverty is structurally embedded in economic, social, cultural
- This analysis of poverty is saliently captured in a recent World Bank policy statement about how it understands and attempts to approach poverty:

Standard of living is multidimensional. In discussing poverty and inequality, therefore, traditional measures based on the level of income and consumption need to be accompanied by other measures that reflect such dimensions as health, education, vulnerability and risk, crime and violence, integration into the mainstream of society, and other factors highlighted *by the poor* themselves as being important. Moreover, not only must the measurement of poverty of the standard of living go below the household to investigate the conditions facing women and children; it must also go above the household level to take into account community-level considerations (World Bank 1998: 45, emphasis added).

This nuanced understanding of the multi-dimensional and differentiated nature of poverty has led to more sophisticated policy responses. It complements the work of NGOs and CBOs who have long argued for participatory-based anti-poverty policy and programmes to ensure that the complex survival strategies of the poor are not further undermined by government interventions and to ensure the control of those directly affected over anti-poverty resources and interventions. To facilitate dialogue and more focussed policy formation, I have translated the literature review of different poverty reduction policy frameworks into a typology of anti-poverty measures.



(Source: Janelle & Plummer 1999)

The toolbox of poverty-reduction measures include the following actions:

- ☒ Facilitating access to good quality employment and economic opportunities;
- ☒ Increasing the physical asset-base of the poor: land, housing, equipment for



- ☒ Facilitating access to basic services for the poor: including water and sanitation, solid waste management, affordable and safe energy, transport education, health and shelter;
- ☒ Strengthening community management of local initiatives and external programmes and ability to self-organise. (The most important plank of anti poverty interventions is to facilitate the autonomy and empowerment of poor households and organisations of the poor—community management);
- ☒ Enhance democratic participation by the poor in public decision making to ensure effective monitoring and influence over public resource allocations and service

These seven policy spheres of anti-poverty action with illustrative examples of possible actions, and what the distinctive and complementary roles of government and CSOs are, are explored in greater detail in the table 1 below (adapted from: Friedmann 1996; May 2000; Pieterse 1999; Rakodi 1999; Satterthwaite 1997; World Bank 2000). I do not critically discuss the different elements in the typology because of space constraints but want to emphasise that the anti-poverty measures are not uncontentious but rather the subject of ongoing debates within various specialist and inter-disciplinary policy constituencies (Friedmann 1996; Maxwell 2001; Satterthwaite 1997).

**Table 1: Typology of Poverty Reduction Measures**

Poverty Reduction Policy Spheres	Examples of appropriate interventions	Roles of State	Roles of CSOs
1. Facilitating access to good quality employment and economic opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Ensuring macro economic policies—monetary, fiscal and exchange rate policies—prioritise the needs of the poor;</li> <li>~ Ensure the following economic policies prioritise and promote the interest of the poor and the informal sector: private investment policies; micro-finance policies; competition policies; labor market policies; trade policy, especially in pro-poor sector; financial sector development programmes; pricing policies;</li> <li>~ Expansion of quality education, especially skills development initiatives;</li> <li>~ Labour-based approaches to public works and/or community contracting for infrastructure and service provision/maintenance and management (e.g. municipal-community-partnerships);</li> <li>~ Enabling policy framework to support and promote the informal sector (e.g. appropriate regulatory framework, land, infrastructure, access to finance).</li> </ul>	<p><b>National Government (NG):</b> Define and implement policies</p> <p><b>Provincial Government (PG) &amp; LG:</b> Implementors of national policies</p>	<p><b>CBOs &amp; NGOs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Research and advocacy on alternative policies;</li> <li>~ Develop indicators through participatory action research (PAR) to inform research and advocacy;</li> <li>~ Monitoring of economic policies</li> </ul>
2. Increasing the physical asset-base of the poor: land, housing, equipment for economic enterprise	<p>Ensure that sectoral and cross-sectoral/integrated development frameworks and plans facilitate an increase in the asset-base of the poor. Sectoral policies would include those of Land Affairs, Housing and SMME and examples of inter-sectoral policies would include the Rural Development Framework, Urban Development Framework, Infrastructure Investment Policy.</p>	<p><b>NG:</b> Develop policy framework in conjunction with PG.</p> <p><b>PG &amp; LG:</b> Develop programmes &amp; implement, in partnership with CSOs</p>	<p><b>CBOs &amp; NGOs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Research and advocacy on impact of policies &amp; formulating alternatives or adaptations;</li> <li>~ Monitoring of performance and impact of policies from perspective of the poor;</li> <li>~ Implement programmes and projects in partnership with PG and LG.</li> <li>~ Build community/hh capability to access programmes</li> </ul>
3. Facilitating access to basic services for the poor: including water and sanitation, solid waste management, affordable and safe energy, transport education, health and shelter	<p><b>Education:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Eradicate literacy through outreach activities and a national campaign;</li> <li>~ Ensure full access to primary schooling through adequate budgetary allocations, quality monitoring of schools, targeted subsidies to ensure full enrolment, devising practical initiatives to reduce gender discrimination;</li> <li>~ Enhancing parental involvement and management of schools and sufficient accountability</li> </ul> <p><b>Health:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Full access to primary health care system and facilities for the poor;</li> <li>~ Ensure parental education;</li> <li>~ Provide access to safe water and sanitation;</li> <li>~ Promote breastfeeding and access to health services including immunisation;</li> <li>~ HIV/AIDS programmes;</li> <li>~ Communication strategies to ensure awareness amongst the poor about rights and facilities;</li> <li>~ Nutrition programs (feeding and parental education)</li> </ul> <p><b>Water &amp; Sanitation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ National policy to ensure access of the poor to a minimum lifeline service to ensure basic daily domestic levels are addressed;</li> <li>~ Community-based infrastructure and maintenance initiatives to keep cost for minimal for the poor but ensure full access</li> <li>~ Basic lifeline for survivalist economic initiatives of home-based enterprises</li> </ul>	<p><b>NG:</b> Develop policy framework in conjunction with PG.</p> <p><b>PG &amp; LG:</b> Develop programmes &amp; implement, in partnership with CSOs</p>	<p><b>CBOs &amp; NGOs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Research and advocacy on impact of policies &amp; formulating alternatives or adaptations;</li> <li>~ Monitoring of performance and impact of policies from perspective of the poor;</li> <li>~ Implement programmes and projects in partnership with PG and LG;</li> <li>~ Strengthen community/household capability to access programmes.</li> </ul>
4. Strengthening community	<p>Community Management is facilitated through initiatives that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ strength community management capability;</li> </ul>	<p><b>NG &amp; PG:</b> Provide an</p>	<p><b>CBOs &amp; NGOs:</b></p>

<p>management of own initiatives and external programmes and ability to self-organise. (The most important plank of anti-poverty interventions is to facilitate the autonomy and empowerment of poor households and organisations of the poor—community management.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ supporting democratic processes internally and externally;</li> <li>~ training and capacity building of organisations;</li> <li>~ providing access to relevant information; ~ supporting collective action aimed at a) increasing access to opportunities and entitlements; and b) transforming policy framework that shape the opportunity structures of the poor.</li> </ul>	<p>enabling environment to promote effective and inclusive communities. <b>LG:</b> Develop explicit MCP policies to promote effective local partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Research and advocacy on enabling environment;</li> <li>~ Monitoring of impact of government and civil society initiatives; ~ Practical projects to effect necessary actions;</li> <li>~ Strengthening umbrella structures.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Enhance democratic participation by the poor in public decision making to ensure effective monitoring and influence over public resource allocations and service delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Pro-active support measures to enable poor households and representative organisations to participate in formal participatory mechanisms (e.g. IDPs), especially at local government level;</li> <li>~ Ensure good governance practices—transparency and accountability—meet needs of the poor: ~ A strong and effective local government system that can ensure the provision of an integrated package of basic services to the poor;</li> <li>~ Improved budget management and transparency, with disaggregated information about expenditure targeting the poor;</li> <li>~ Information and public dialogue tailored to the needs of the poor;</li> <li>~ Targeted anti-corruption efforts in the public service that interface with the poor;</li> <li>~ Actions on gender discrimination.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NG:</b> Develop policy frameworks and programmes in conjunction with PG &amp; LG.</p> <p><b>PG &amp; LG:</b> Develop programmes &amp; implement, in partnership with CSDs.</p>	<p><b>CBOs &amp; NGOs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Research on the access of the poor to decision-making and realisation of all rights;</li> <li>~ Monitoring performance and impact of government policies and institutions;</li> <li>~ Implement human rights awareness and civic education programmes and projects in partnership with PG and LG;</li> <li>~ Foster gender awareness and planning skills in state and civil society institutions.</li> </ul>
<p>6. Ensure the access of the poor to legal entitlements and security</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Fair judicial system that meet the needs of the poor</li> <li>~ Providing squatters/landless communities with tenure to reduce risk of eviction and increase value of the assess, and so raise prospect of accessing credit;</li> <li>~ Ensure access to relevant information about human rights, socio-economic rights and right to information and quality service from public sector officials;</li> <li>~ Access to information about legal instruments to ensure employment protection and workplace safety and security, especially for domestic workers;</li> <li>~ Protection against violence and insecurity at household and community levels;</li> <li>~ Opportunity and facilities to exercise political democratic rights and responsibilities via adequate arrangements for elections.</li> </ul> <p>political representation and accountability.</p>	<p><b>NG:</b> Develop policy framework in conjunction with PG and LG.</p> <p><b>PG &amp; LG:</b> Develop programmes and implement, in partnership with CSDs.</p>	<p><b>CBOs &amp; NGOs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Research on the access of the poor to justice and protection;</li> <li>~ Monitoring performance and impact of government policies and institutions, especially the courts;</li> <li>~ Implement human rights awareness and civic education programmes and projects in partnership with Constitutional Commissions;</li> <li>~ Capacity building of community-based initiatives that promote safety and security and access to entitlements, e.g. community forums.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Ensure access to safety nets to strengthen ability to manage shocks and stresses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Access to risk management mechanisms, e.g. micro-credit and safety net programs (e.g. public works);</li> <li>~ Access to emergency curative care;</li> <li>~ Actions to reduce violence (e.g. community policing);</li> <li>~ Measures to mitigate environment disaster risks (e.g. better designed infrastructure);</li> <li>~ Spending on and targeting of safety net programs, including nutrition, disability, old-age pensions and child support grants and other access to state maintenance grants.</li> <li>~ Emergency credit facilities for the poor in times of disaster or rapid economic decline</li> </ul>	<p><b>NG:</b> Develop policy framework in conjunction with PG.</p> <p><b>PG &amp; LG:</b> Develop programmes &amp; implement, in partnership with CSDs</p>	<p><b>CBO &amp; NGOs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Ensuring access to relevant information and support services;</li> <li>~ Lobbying government for adequate provisions to meet minimum needs of the poor;</li> <li>~ Monitoring impact of social safety measures to inform improvement and better targeting of the measures;</li> <li>~ Collaborating with government</li> </ul>

This typology enables one to disaggregate a discussion about poverty reduction policies and strategies because too often development discourse remains at a generalized level,

inhibiting the potential for meaningful and informed debate. However, a number of qualifications need to be stressed. Since the lives of poor people are by definition integrated, it follows that anti-poverty measures are most effective if it can be shaped along the contours of everyday life of poor households. Fragmented and sectoral-based approaches can lead to unforeseen consequences that undermine the integrated survival strategies of the poor, as acknowledged in the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS) (SA Government 2000). This also requires an explicit recognition of subjectivity and difference amongst poor people depending on variables such as rural/urban, men/women, generation, ethnic and racial identity, location within (or between) an urban or rural settlement, etcetera (Rakodi 1999). Anti-poverty strategies that are not tailored to deal with the specific manifestations of poverty and differences amongst poor populations are likely to fail or have detrimental unintended consequences. Further, the scale and complexity of poverty is vast and the input of all social actors is required to ensure maximum reach and impact. However, unless such inputs are properly co-ordinated and feed into a broader strategy it could also lead to wastage and impact negatively on poor communities and households.

The typology also provides insights about the *potential* inter-relationships between government and CSOs around the shared objective of poverty reduction (potentially enriching contiguous debates about development partnerships). In every instance, these potential inter-relationships can be expressed at either the micro or macro level, or both. This typology further helps to clarify the range of possible anti-poverty actions but it does not deal with *how* it can best be implemented at different scales of intervention to ensure integrated and sustainable development outcomes. In my opinion, the how question demands of all the actors in the development process to transgress the taken-for-granted assumptions about who they are, how they function, how they inter-act with other actors, and especially, how they assess their impact in terms of their respective missions. To open up this discussion it is necessary to explore integrated development processes more closely, especially in light of the generalized 'acceptance' that CBOs and grassroots level initiatives should be the lead actors in the development process.

## **INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES**

Integrated development processes can be explored at many different levels, e.g. at national level in terms of various national development strategies, e.g. the ISRDS; at regional level such as provincial development frameworks; or at local level in terms of municipal boundaries, e.g. integrated development plans (IDPs); or even at a lower scale such as a specific community in a given neighbourhood.

Theory and practice suggests that integrated development must be reflected in a range of national strategies that are pursued through the politics of inclusive democracy, appropriate economic growth, gender equality, and sustainable and inter-generational equity. Broad-based development is unattainable without a robust and sustainable economic development thrust. The complexity and political challenge of integrated development is that economic growth can easily become the most dominant and primary objective, pursued at the expense of equity, political plurality and environmental sustainability. Typically, this is evidence when dominant political discourses invoke *consensual* politics and rely on the *voluntary* commitment of various stakeholders to 'sustainable development' principles and processes. In a middle-income country such as SA with dramatic development challenges, which is seeking entry into a highly unequal and unbalanced global context, striking a balanced approach remains politically difficult and economically precarious. The government's experience with meeting the tariff

reduction trade obligations of the World Trade Organisation and the European Community, which partially caused job losses, is evidence of this.

Integrated development must acknowledge and be responsive to the needs and entrenched rights of citizens and households. Empirically, the needs of a large section of the population remain unmet due to the scale of the historical legacy that have systemically excluded black South Africans from education, economic, political and cultural opportunities for advancement. One can anticipate that it will therefore take a long time and sustained political will to reverse this legacy. However, prevailing inequalities continue to be reproduced through social systems of division and discrimination—race, class, gender, age, and ethnicity. This highlights the need for *political engagement* to advance the empowerment of poor households and individuals through razor-sharp legislative and policy instruments.

Achieving the aims of integrated development is complex and often elusive because it entails effecting change that will lead to productive inter-relationships between economic and social change, along with the deepening of civic participation in local affairs, manifested in greater capacity to access and influence decision-making over resources at local (government) level. Forging productive and organic linkages between economic and social change is the most important challenge, but unfortunately the least understood within civil society and the state. Though, there are emerging examples of initiatives across the government-civil society divide that are experimenting with programmes that articulate economic and social objectives. Examples include employment creation initiatives through the community-based public works programmes, income generation initiatives funded via the poverty fund of the Department of Welfare, promotion of social housing options by the Department of Housing, amongst others. As yet, these initiatives are incipient, inevitably flawed and a long way off from making an impact on the ‘normal business’ of the large social delivery departments. Common amongst these initiatives is the turn to NGOs and CBOs to provide guidance and skills to support community-based associations to structure themselves appropriately to be local partners in government programmes that seek to achieve successful linkages between social and economic objectives.

However, most NGOs are also still struggling to understand the inter-relationships between the following considerations: level of development input and incentive; type of community-based institution; types of links with external actors in the private sector and government; and level of support to make the chemistry at community level happen in a way that it is owned and sustained by the community themselves. Yet, even though most NGOs and CBOs are ill equipped at present to do this type of development work well, they remain the most appropriate and promising actors to fulfil this indispensable function. The broader challenge is to rapidly promote awareness and ensure relevant capacity strengthening to transform CSOs into effective change agents for a new, transgressive type of development intervention that is integrated and holistic.

### **The move towards integrated area-based development**

Integrated development is most important at the local level where poverty is directly experienced and negotiated through ingenuity, dignity and the will to survive against the odds. It is the level where there is the most energy and commitment to eradicate it in all its manifestations. However, the critical prerequisite is *effective* development institutions and processes. In this section I explore the relevance of local level integrated development and the challenges associated with making it a reality.

Development discourse and plans since the Reconstruction and Development Programme have been characterised by the call for greater co-ordination and integration, but very few organisations (in civil society or government) actually know what it means for day-to-day operational practice, especially since funding sources continue to be structured on a sectoral/specialised basis. The growing importance of the integrated approach is reflected in the shift amongst NGOs to work more and more on an area-based and/or integrated approach to development. Various pieces of legislation also reinforce an area-based and integrated approach to development, especially the Local Government Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) that requires all municipalities to prepare an integrated development plan (IDP) through a participatory process. The feasibility and democratic value of IDPs are by no means guaranteed or unambiguous (Pieterse, forthcoming 2001). The recent policy announcements of the government—the ISRDS and the Integrated Democratic Governance policy—suggest that a more informed and pragmatic understanding of integrated development is taking form (SA Government 2000; The Presidency 2001). Significantly, the ISRDS argues that integrated development can only be realised if there is a practical mechanism to ensure institutional, and especially financial, alignment to underpin more integrated ways of working. This mechanism is the IDP process at municipal level, which is meant to be the primary filter to ensure that all the disparate government, private sector, donor and civil society contributions are adequately coordinated and sequenced in line with local priorities defined through a participatory process (see: Evaratt, this volume).

It is crucial not to be vague and over-optimistic about area-based integrated development and in the process build it up as a panacea for all local-level development issues. Integrated area-based development is complex and difficult for a number of inter-related reasons:

- ☒ Funding sources, both government and independent development aid, are usually earmarked for sectoral interventions, e.g. health services, water provision, agricultural inputs, etc;
- ☒ The skills base in service providing agencies, both government and NGOs are often sectorally oriented, even if it speaks the language of holism and integration; in other words, it is integration with a particular sectoral bias;
- ☒ CBOs who drive development projects also tend to be organised into sectoral structures, e.g. health committees, water committees, welfare committees, etc. In many communities there are also ‘in theory’ cross cutting structures such as IDP forums, development committees, RD forums/committees or even street committees. However, these structures tend to focus on specific sectoral interventions due to the nature of resource streams and often do not have the tools to plan or assess

These factors may lead to the premature conclusion that we should abandon the ideal of integrated, multi-dimensional, area-based development as an unrealistic ideal. This would be a mistake. It is possible, and indeed essential, to achieve greater synergy and mutual benefit between various development strategies, but this should not be seen as an absolute objective. In other words, one must be able to distinguish when co-ordination and integration is appropriate and when necessary degree of fragmentation and parallel activity may be necessary, and even more productive. (This ties in with finding the right level and

type of participatory process for different types of development interventions (Pieterse 1998).)

Integrated development does not mean that every development input and process must be fully linked, co-ordinated and planned simultaneously. Practically it simply means that every development initiative must be planned and implemented in a manner that it maximises the potential that may arise from appropriate linkage with other interventions, and more importantly, it must assess whether it does not undermine or undo other activities. In addition, it needs to be answerable to broader crosscutting objectives such as gender equity, fostering democratic community management practices, being environmentally sustainable and conscious, etc.

An integrated development approach recognises that all development work is profoundly political because it is about shifting power relations, and in this sense, it is crucial that different development inputs reinforce and strengthen a politics of empowerment and equity. Social transformation is contingent on transforming unequal power relations. Development institutions across sectors need to be conscious and explicit about how they use their main levers of intervention—grant-making, research, capacity building, training, facilitation, conflict resolutions, etc.—to strengthen a broad-based politics of empowerment and equity. In the hurly-burly of survival this focus tends to become obscure.

To conclude this section it is worth re-emphasising that locally-specific integrated development approaches must reflect the needs and interests of the beneficiaries as a starting point for conceptualisation and intervention. As Alan Fowler reminds one, appropriate development must be based on “understanding the social structures and patterns that give meaning to people’s lives and expression to their interests, beliefs, status, rights, obligations and aspirations”(Fowler 2000: 63). Mapping these dynamics and shaping interventions on the basis of it make it easier to identify appropriate strategies and understand areas of opportunity and sensitivity. More importantly, it potentially permits a critical assessment of the right and capability of external actors to intervene at all.

Integrated development at macro and micro scales is only possible if there is a strong presence of multiple development institutions within poor communities and in civil society more broadly to support and strengthen grassroots organisations and processes of empowerment. I will now explore these institutional interfaces more directly.

## **INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING BLOCS OF INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT**

At the broadest scale, South Africa needs a strong development state and a strong civil society, especially with organisations that are developmentally oriented. A strong developmental state must act from a bedrock of a vibrant, pluralist and inclusive democracy in a manner that facilitates the empowerment of non-state actors to allow them to fulfil their promise in the interest of a just and inclusive society. Such a state must be organised in a manner that distributes appropriate powers to the level (i.e. national, provincial, local or community), where it is best exercised and facilitates autonomous initiative by people, organisations in their own communities. The democratic state in South Africa is increasingly growing into a purposeful and effective developmental state, even if the path zigzags, and the multiple contradictions that it seeks to negotiate creates an aura of disarray.



However, civil society organisations are by and large in crisis with encouraging exceptions (on NGOs, see Kraak this volume). For the purpose of discussion and debate I will distinguish between four ‘organisational’ forms—households, (informal) community associations, CBOs and NGOs—that populate the development landscape at the local level. In the complexity of community spaces on the ground, these conceptual distinctions tend to bleed into one another, especially community associations and CBOs. I find it useful to distinguish between these because of the unique South African history. Membership-based CBOs have tended to be disproportionately promoted because of their important political role in the struggle against the apartheid state and their convenience as ideological conveyer belts for political movements. In the process, cultural and livelihood related social formations in poor communities were frequently over-looked by development institutions because they were not democratic and/or progressive enough. However, with the implosion of politically minded CBOs post 1994, there has been a growing appreciation of the role of less formalised associations, even if with rather instrumentalist overtones (Seekings 2000).

It can be argued that from a poverty reduction perspective, the most important institutional unit is the household (Friedmann 1992). Households may be defined as a residential group of persons who live under the same roof and eat out of the same pot. Persons residing in a household may be related or not. Meaningful family structures include kin who may live in other households that are spatially dispersed but linked to each other through a web of mutual obligation and responsibility. Households are where everyone experiences and exercise fundamental political, economic and social decision-making. Poor households in particular have to conduct ongoing processes of decision-making and trade-offs to meet competing needs with inadequate income and assets. It is also in this process that household-level forms of inequality and power relations manifest, especially gender and age inequalities. The ability of one household compared to another to manage hardship and external shocks depend on their levels of access to relevant information, knowledge and skills, participation in social organisation and financial resources (Beall & Kanji 1999; Moser 1996). External development processes are fundamentally about understanding these assets and finding appropriate ways of augmenting and growing it and so facilitate the empowerment of poor households, embedded in multiple social networks.

The second level of organisations is various forms of associational structures for mutual benefit/pleasure that poor individuals and households participate in to provide access to financial support, relevant information, recreation, spiritual comfort, food, and other resources to facilitate productive activities. The most common examples of these types of associations are savings clubs (*stokvels*), cultural organisations such as choral associations, religious structures and so forth. These types of organisations are probably the most important source of social capital that enables many poor households to survive times of stress and crisis. Social capital as a concept denotes the trust, reciprocal arrangements and social networks that link people in a community (Moser 1996). However, very little substantive information is available about the precise role and nature of these organisations and how it can be harnessed for developmental purposes. By definition they are usually informal, unregistered in terms of the Non-Profit Act (1998) and outside of formal development processes, although not always. Community meetings and forums tend to be ideal forums for these organisations to relate to broader social-political processes that may impinge on their members and their own viability.

The third and most significant layer of organisation is membership-based community-based organisations (CBOs). These are formalised *representative* organisations that champion the interest of their members who could be defined on a geographic basis



(specific neighbourhood, e.g. a civic association) or are issue-specific, e.g. woman's organisations, or welfare associations, etc. As membership organisations, the risks, costs and benefits are shared among the members, and the leadership may be called to account to members. Most are non-profit although some operate as co-operative commercial enterprises. It can be difficult to draw a neat distinction between CBOs and (informal) associations but for the sake of this paper, the former refer to membership-based organisations with a *democratic* structure. Both types would manifest examples of organisations that are formally registered (or self-identified) as CBOs in terms of the Non-Profit Act.

The final layer of organisations that need to be considered are professional, registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a developmental focus. These could be structured on a sectoral/thematic, regional or national basis and be single organisations, or a network of affiliated organisations. NGOs are professional, non-profit, non-membership intermediary organisations that are independent of the state and which undertake a range of activities in order to further development objectives. Typically activities can be categorised in one of the following ways: public policy research, policy dialogue support and facilitation, rights-based and interest group advocacy, capacity building in the form of information dissemination and training, support and facilitation of social service delivery and direct delivery. NGOs usually work with, or on behalf of (poor) communities, but they can also service government, and/or international NGOs and development agencies, and/or local NGOs and development agencies (cf. Eade 1998; Mitlin 1999; Thomas 1998). Frequently, NGOs tend to be de-linked from local communities for reasons related to the history of the sector and the abundance of funding (Pieterse 1998). This is proving to be the Achilles' heel of the sector in efforts to reinvent and recast itself in a post-apartheid context. The sector is so profoundly diverse that these generalisations are obviously overstated. For example, the emerging pattern suggests that we now have an number of large and effective NGOs such as Mvula Trust, Independent Development Trust, amongst others; a number of medium-sized (10-30 staff) anchor NGOs in each sector that tends to set the example for good practice and relevance; and a plethora of small-scale NGOs (1-9 staff members) of greatly varying quality.

These stoic classifications crudify the fluidity and indeterminacy of everyday life in lived spaces. In particular it brushes over the 'mixed-up' identities of local structures that are often adept at reinventing themselves to fulfil multiple functions, depending on opportunities and political pressures. It also fails to capture associational spaces that arise from time to time when community meetings and forums are convened to identify local problems and/or initiate a new development process in a locality. In rural areas (and frequently peri-urban areas as well), the power and influence of traditional leaders remain a critical variable that shapes the identity of local organisations and the nature of development processes. In urban areas, poor neighbourhoods are typically dominated by powerful 'strongmen' with coercive muscle who control access to vital resources for household (re)production. If government programmes require 'CBOs' or 'development forums', these actors can mobilise accordingly to delivery CBOs. If the requirement is for 'labour' to participate in public works programmes, traditional leaders or 'strongmen' will be very important in determining who will access these opportunities and on what terms. Effective development processes must engage with these actors because trying to circumvent them will probably jeopardise the viability of the programme. Such political practices destabilize clinical distinctions and mechanistic conceptions of local development processes.

International comparative trends suggest that NGOs have distinctive strengths and roles in contrast to government and other categories of civil society organisations. However, in

South Africa NGOs are struggling to make the transition to become effective in a democratic pro-development context (Kraak, this volume). Many NGOs still operate with their traditional anti-apartheid structures and ideological approaches in tact and find it hard to find the balance of critical engagement, i.e. combining autonomous democratic criticism and co-operation around shared objectives with the state. In line with international trends, as South Africa is normalising, the distinctive role of NGOs include the following: working with local agents of change to understand and promote integrative, cross-cutting, thematic, participatory and innovative approaches to development, tailored to specific situations (Fowler 2000).

Clearly, none of these institutional sectors are homogenous or conflict-free. It would be a mistake to ignore the prevalence of unequal power relations within these sectors and individual organisations. Gender inequality in particular is often in evidence but also other forms of social exclusion and discrimination, such as urban/rural distinctions, regional location (marginalized province/part of a province), sexuality, ability, and so forth. The broader issue is that civil society is broad and includes many 'uncivil' forms of organisation and association. Again, as Alan Fowler reminds us, "civil society encompasses contending power relations and group interests that can both advance and impede poverty reduction, equity, inclusion justice and other social development objectives" (2000: 7).

In summary, we can conclude that the most effective roles for CSOs in the broader anti-poverty effort include the following:

- ☒ Providing cost-effective access to, and effectively deliver tangible services (such as

- education, health care and credit) that reduce unemployment and levels of poverty among the most vulnerable of the population, particularly women and children;

- ☒ Engendering people-centred social development processes, build local capacity and

- the 'ownership' of benefits that will be sustained, eventually without or with minimal

- external finance and support;

- ☒ Increasing leverage on local, provincial, national and international policies that

- condition the achievement of social development goals, especially poverty eradication;

☒ Acting as watchdogs of the public good and safeguard the interests of disadvantaged

This can only come to fruition if there is more widespread debate about the differential roles of all social actors. Hopefully, the statutory obligations facing the National Development Agency and the political mandate of SANGOCO will be taken forward in a manner that fosters such a debate.

## IN CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to move the debate about effective anti-poverty development work forward. One of the main reasons for the limited success in this regard is the institutional uncertainty and lack of rigour that characterise most development organisations, inside and outside the public sector. As demonstrated earlier, poverty is multi-dimensional and complex. This requires sophisticated anti-poverty responses, which fundamentally means that we have to radically re-think the institutional practices and interfaces within the non-profit development sector between the state, the private sector and CSOs.

This paper endeavoured to provide a conceptual framework and a few working concepts to inform institutional review and dialogue that will hopefully lead to acts of transgression. We desperately need our development institutions to become more than themselves and

this can only be discovered in the process of working differently; that is, in partnership and alliance with others and self-critically. Key concepts that I covered include a review of 'poverty' itself and the notion of 'integrated development', which carries a lot of currency within government and civil society, and therefore a strategic site to locate a transgressive praxis. However, as I demonstrated, the full potential and implications of this concept has not been explored enough. The paper addresses this in part by providing a rounded discussion on the role of different anti-poverty actors, and how these institutions can make a contribution to the realisation of integrated development at the most local level. Unless we become more precise in our understandings about how structural poverty is reproduced on a day-to-day basis, and attune our institutional efforts accordingly, we are unlikely to make much of an impact in reversing the horrific trends that lead to greater impoverishment and inequality. It is time to transgress the institutional boundaries that have become so normalised over the last few years and embrace the challenge of continuous collaboration, contestation and learning.

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