

Forgotten by the highway:
Globalisation, adverse incorporation
and chronic poverty in a commercial
farming district of South Africa

Andries du Toit, December 2004



**Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies
School of Government, University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa.
www.uwc.ac.za/plaas, presence@iafrica.com**

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Abstract

This paper presents key findings from a livelihoods survey of households in four poor neighbourhoods in the Western Cape district of Ceres, one of the centres of South Africa's deciduous fruit export industry. It explores the nature and dynamics of the persistence of poverty in the context of continued and relatively sustained economic development and growth, and considers whether the concept of 'social exclusion' can help in making sense – especially policy sense – of these dynamics. It is suggested that while focusing on 'social exclusion' certainly helps draw attention to power relations, powerlessness, and the processes that perpetuate these, coming up with workable policy responses to social exclusion requires developing a much more nuanced analysis of the social processes involved in what is perhaps more productively thought of as 'adverse incorporation'. The paper begins with a short description of Ceres and a brief introduction to the key theoretical issues. A schematic overview of social relations and inequality in Western Cape agriculture precedes a summary of some of the key policy responses developed to address poverty and inequality after the transition to democratic rule, and a sketch of some of the most important trends in the sector. This provides the background for a discussion of household livelihood activities and problems. The paper draws on quantitative surveys and semi-structured interviews with selected households, as well as on analyses and insights flowing from medium and long-term qualitative research and fieldwork on deciduous fruit production and social power relations in the area.

Author's note

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the April 2003 Chronic Poverty conference (Du Toit 2003). Some of the arguments have appeared in modified form in journal form (Du Toit 2004). The names of some persons cited in case studies and examples in the study have been changed in order to conform to agreements entered into during interviews.

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1. Introduction

'Left behind' in Bella Vista Zone 3

Katriena Sym considers herself lucky. She has a roof over her head, a husband who has found work on a farm near by, and a lodger who contributes to the household expenses. '*Ceres is baie hard, en ek praat nou van hard*' she says, pronouncing her consonants with flinty Karoo precision, '*maar ek dink ons sal darem regkom*'.¹ She surveys the inside of her house. There is a plastic milk-crate which does duty as a chair; there is a primus stove and a few pots; there are two sour and ragged foam mattresses; and there is a ramshackle cupboard containing half a kilo of flour, some salt, sugar and cooking oil, and one tin of cheap mackerel. Beyond that, there is literally not a stick of furniture. The little space is bare and empty, cold in winter and hot in summer: most days Katriena prefers to sit outside in the shade or (in winter) at a fire built from scavenged wood or even discarded plastic soft drink bottles.

She has plenty of time to sit around these days. Her eyes have deteriorated much in recent years ('*my gesientes is nou nie wat dit was nie*')² and she is medically unfit for the hard and exacting work of picking fruit and pruning trees she has done for most of her 39 years. She originally hails from Williston in the Karoo, but she has spent a significant part of her adult life away from home, travelling with teams of seasonal workers to Ceres, Citrusdal and other towns in the Western Cape's horticultural districts. It was a hard and expensive life, being an *uitwerker*, and she has decided to settle in Ceres. So far, she thinks it was a good decision. Her common-law husband, Isak, has found work at a neighbouring farm, and they now have a lodger who has also promised to contribute to household expenses.

But in spite of having made this move, her conditions still seem grim. Indeed, there is an unsettling vagueness about Katriena's hopes that things will improve. The reality is that her husband's job has not brought in much money. In theory he should be paid between R150 and R200 per week, but she sees almost none of it. Lack of cash means that they have to 'borrow' food supplied by the farm shop operated by Isak's employer. The supermarket in town is significantly cheaper – but the supermarket does not extend credit. Every week, Isak's payslip shows that most of the money he has earned has already been 'eaten up'. In a good week, he will bring home R50; sometimes he brings home nothing at all. When he does bring money home, Katriena spends a significant part of it on their accumulated water debt, but she does not know how much she owes. In practice, she often has to rely for food on contributions from Isak's mother, or from '*die kind se pa se ma*'³ – the mother of another man by whom she has had her five year-old child. They will often lend her a cup of flour or a bit of meat; if all else fails, at least the child is able to sit down with his grandmother at table. Katriena goes hungry.

One woman: one household. The details of Katriena's life and circumstances are specific to her. Each household in Vyeboomstreet and in all the other bleached, bare roads of Bella Vista Zone 3 will have a different story to tell. But the themes and the relationships will be similar. For Katriena and others like her, living and working in the fertile valleys of the Western Cape has not brought respite from poverty. Survival is possible, and people are resourceful, but hunger, debt, insecurity and dependence have characterised their lives for as long as they have known, and unless the underlying conditions that perpetuate this poverty disappear, it is unlikely that this will change.

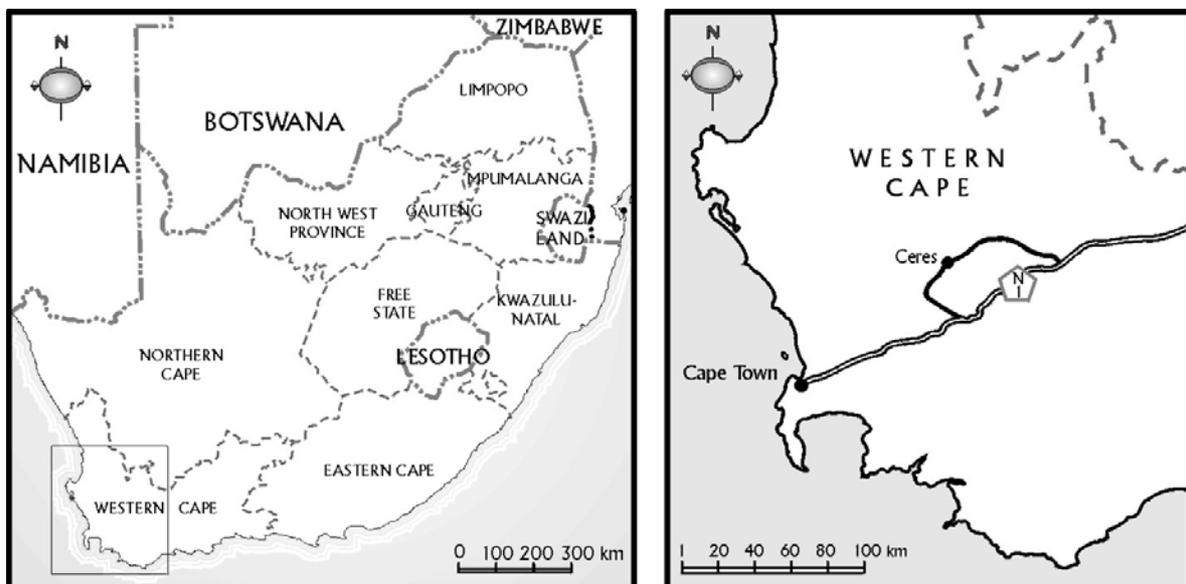
And there is very little they can do about it. Katriena and her neighbours survive at the margins of rural Western Cape society. It is an odd kind of marginality: without her and other men and women like her who carry tons of Bon Chretien apples and Granny Smith pears out of the orchards every summer – sometimes at less than R30 (about US\$5 at 2004 exchange rates) per day – there would be no fruit industry. But this economic centrality is accompanied by social and political invisibility. From the point of view of those who hold power in Ceres, Katriena hardly exists – except as a

potential source of labour. Politically, the poor in Ceres are not a force to be reckoned with. Instead, they are recipients of concern, objects of development, members of what is patronisingly referred to as the *agtergeblewene gemeenskap*.⁴ Economically and socially survival depends on the largesse of those who are wealthier and more powerful. Perhaps it is this brutal fact that is behind Katriena's striking gentleness of manner – the way in which, from some perspectives, she hardly seems to walk the earth. Her very existence is a tentative one, dependent on a tiny net of fragile relationships. It is a position in which it is possible to dream, hope and plan. But the plans are small.

Chronic poverty on a farmed landscape

This paper presents key findings from a livelihoods survey of households in four poor neighbourhoods in the Western Cape district of Ceres, one of the centres of South Africa's deciduous fruit export industry (see Figure 1). It explores the nature and dynamics of the persistence of poverty in the context of continued and relatively sustained economic development and growth, and considers whether the concept of 'social exclusion' can help in making sense – especially policy sense – of these dynamics.

Figure 1: Location maps of Ceres



As will be seen, the conclusions are mixed. Focusing on 'social exclusion' – correctly understood – certainly helps draw attention to power relations, powerlessness, and the processes that perpetuate these. Coming up with workable policy responses to social exclusion requires us, however, to develop a much more nuanced analysis of the social processes involved in what is perhaps more productively thought of not as exclusion but as 'adverse incorporation'.

The paper begins with a short description of Ceres as a centre of Western Cape horticulture and a brief introduction to the key theoretical issues at stake. It provides a schematic overview of social relations and inequality in Western Cape agriculture, summarises some of the key policy responses developed to address poverty and inequality after the transition to democratic rule in 1994, and sketches some of the most important trends in the sector. This provides the background for a discussion of key aspects of livelihood activities and problems among households in the neighbourhoods surveyed.

This discussion draws not only on quantitative surveys and semi-structured interviews with selected households in the survey sample, but also on analyses and insights that flow out of medium and long-term qualitative research and fieldwork on various aspects of deciduous fruit production and social power relations in the area. This sets the scene for a more detailed consideration of some of the underlying theoretical issues at stake, and a short discussion of some of some important policy issues.

2. Livelihoods at the margin

Ceres: poverty in a fertile valley

The town of Ceres, situated some 160km north east of Cape Town, may look like an unlikely site for the study of the dynamics of long-term poverty. To the visitor cresting the top of Mitchell's Pass, it looks just as it is described by advertising copywriters on the boxes of Ceres Fruit Juice that is the town's most prominent branded export: a fertile valley nestling among the mountains, protected from the south-east wind and drenched by the sun. Throughout the summer, a long procession of diesel trucks labour up and down that pass, plying the route between the surrounding valleys and Cape Town harbour. The mountainside is rugged, bare and stony but for most of the year the dams are full and the valley floors of the Warm- and Kouebokkeveld mountains bear the evidence of the orderly activities of industrialised agriculture: onion and wheat fields, stud and sheep farms – and, above all, neat and serried ranks of closely planted orchards: apples, pears, nectarines, peaches and plums. With the general dealers, furniture stores, filling stations, bed and breakfast establishments and fast-food chains lined up along its main road, Ceres and the nearby villages of Prince Alfred's Hamlet and Op die Berg present a landscape typical of any one of a number of small to medium-sized Western Cape country towns. Certainly, when compared to impoverished areas – the eroded and densely populated hillsides of the Eastern Cape, or the arid plains of Namaqualand to the north, for example – Ceres and its surrounding valleys seem part of a landscape where abundant natural resources and successful commercial activity would at least have the chance of ensuring decent livelihoods for those who work and live there.

It has not always been so. The history of Ceres has in many ways been a story of roads, routes and remoteness since long before deciduous fruit became a major industry. Settled in the 18th century, it was a relative backwater until South Africa's mineral revolution in 1870s, when its location on the 'great road' to the north east that connected the Cape with the diamond mines of Kimberley brought it some prominence as a way station (Smuts & Alberts 1988). Diamonds were eventually eclipsed by gold, and the N1 and N7 highways have overtaken the path through the Karooport as the routes to the north, but increasing integration into national networks and markets opened the path for the development of fruit farming in the region. While the wine farming areas in the surrounding Breede River region stagnated, mostly due to anti-apartheid sanctions, Ceres steadily grew. Mixed farming (fruit, wheat, vegetables and livestock) increasingly gave way to specialisation and, by the 1990s, Ceres was a major centre of intensive deciduous fruit production for export. The high valleys of the Kouebokkeveld mountains were given over mostly to apple production, with stone fruit and pears predominating in the lower-lying Warmbokkeveld. By 1998, with more than 11 000 ha of land planted to deciduous fruit, Ceres was producing almost 60% of South Africa's entire pear crop, and had a gross geographic product of R265 million. But most of the 20 000 or so people who worked on these farms did not see any of this wealth. Fully half of the households in Ceres surveyed in the 1996 Census earned less than R18 000 per annum (US\$3 000), and in a third of rural enumerator areas, incomes were below R1 000 (US\$166) per month. For those who worked in the orchards, the realities of life were those experienced by Katriena Sym in the example above: a life on the edges of survival.

Social exclusion and inequality in South Africa

From its initial use in French discussions on social policies in the 1970s, the concept of 'social exclusion' has become increasingly dominant in European and UK debates about poverty. It is reported to have increasingly replaced 'poverty' as an object of EU policy concern (Evans 1998), and has become very closely linked to the institutionalisation of official anti-poverty initiatives,

such as in the creation in 1997 of an interdepartmental Social Exclusion Unit by the British government (Percy-Smith 2000).

In spite of the fact that the concept originated in the context of wealthy European welfare states in the 1970s and its history of very close links to specifically EU policy concerns (Evans 1998; Percy-Smith 2000) the concept has broadened considerably in scope and meaning, and since the late 1990s there has been interest in seeing whether it can be used to understand poverty and chronic poverty in 'Southern' contexts (De Haan & Maxwell 1998). One of the key problems here is the vagueness of the concept itself, because for all its prominence its theoretical content is rarely tightly and rigidly specified. This may be part of its appeal – as Evans suggests, perhaps the concept has become so attractive partly because of this vagueness (Evans 1998:46). Certainly, it has been used by researchers and policymakers from very diverse theoretical backgrounds, and has been given very divergent meanings within different political and intellectual circles (Silver 1994).

Even so, the attempt to use the concept outside its original scope of application does raise – even in principle – some initial difficulties. For one thing, there are very important differences between European societies and those in the South, not least because poverty in contexts like sub-Saharan Africa may be viewed as the situation of the mass of the population rather than a fate suffered by a minority excluded from the benefits of participation of society at large (Gore 1994). Gore has nonetheless argued that a complex politics of exclusion and inclusion has formed an important part of the histories of African societies and has accordingly included these dynamics in his survey of social exclusion in Africa.

The question, however, is whether 'social exclusion' can be linked to the roots of chronic poverty in Africa – in other words, whether it has application beyond the limits of a concern with the exclusion of or discrimination against particular 'subordinate groups', and whether it has anything to teach us about poverty as such. Some theorists certainly seem to believe so: they have been attracted to the concept because it has seemed to be available for interpretations that link it closely with other increasingly dominant paradigms such as the sustainable livelihoods framework (DFID 2000) and Amartya Sen's work on capabilities and entitlements. What these approaches have in common is an interest in broadening the understanding of poverty beyond a narrow monetary focus on income and expenditure. Understood in this way, analyses of 'social exclusion' can potentially highlight the multi-dimensional nature of the implications of poverty, and highlight the longer-term social and institutional processes that shape it (De Haan 1998). Taking their cue from De Haan, Hulme, Moore and Shepherd have therefore proposed that the concept may be useful in the general study of chronic poverty:

as de Haan (1999) discusses, the concept has been... usefully extended to encompass the multi-dimensional, relational aspects of deprivation and poverty— i.e. people are excluded not only from publicly provided services but from a broad range of social, political and economic institutions, and as a result experience lack of capabilities and entitlements. Social exclusion may therefore be a useful starting point from which to understand the politics surrounding chronic poverty, perhaps especially where chronic poverty is based on the discrimination of a particular social group or 'underclass'.
(Hulme et al. 2001:27)

There is certainly food for thought in this broad definition of what 'social exclusion' is about. Consider, for instance, the idea that the existence and possible growth of such an underclass – a significant group of marginalised, relatively unskilled and poorly paid workers making an uncertain living out of seasonal labour in the agricultural economy – is far from unique to the deciduous fruit farming sector. Recent scholarship (May 2000; Nattrass & Seekings 2001) suggest that poverty in South Africa is particularly concentrated in two large groups – the marginal working class and an 'other' class made of the dispossessed jobless – that are unable to participate fully in the formal economy. While the wealthiest 12% of households control 45% of the total household income in

South Africa, these two impoverished groups, which together comprise some 41% of South African society, only manage to secure 10% of its total income (see Table 1). Furthermore, while South Africa is similar to the most unequal societies in the world in its income distribution, there is one important difference: unlike countries like Brazil and Chile, the poor in South Africa are not involved in subsistence agriculture. This means that the poorest of the poor are worse off in terms of their share of total income than in Latin American countries (Natrass & Seekings 2001:476).

Table 1: South Africa’s class structure and income inequality (from Natrass & Seekings 2001)

| | Mean household income R/month 1993 | Households in each class as a % of all households | Income in each class as a % of total income |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Upper class | 7 020 | 12 | 45 |
| Semi-professional class | 3 264 | 5 | 8 |
| Intermediate class | 2 257 | 19 | 22 |
| Core working class | 1 187 | 19 | 11 |
| Petty traders | 1 442 | 5 | 4 |
| Marginal working class | 618 | 12 | 4 |
| Other | 413 | 29 | 6 |
| Total | | 100 | 100 |

The existence of these large, marginalised and impoverished groupings in South African society – and the profound division between them and the much wealthier groupings of urban and formally employed ‘insiders’ – raises important and complex policy issues. Natrass and Seekings argue that while fiscal policy in South Africa has been relatively redistributive, its effects may have been undermined by the adoption of a growth path that militates against the creation of jobs in the labour-intensive sectors of the economy. South African industry has, they argue, been caught between simultaneous processes of industry deregulation and increasingly high levels of labour market re-regulation. Globalisation has increased opportunities in some quarters, but it has also led to increasing competition – while at the same time labour market regulation has become more rigid. Rather than allow for more flexibility, minimum wage levels in many industries are set by centralised bargaining councils. In the context of an economy where the demand curve for labour is relatively price-sensitive, they argue that this has created an incentive for industries to move away from labour absorptive strategies towards capital intensity. These policies benefit an increasingly small and beleaguered core working class at the same time as they deepen the divisions that exclude those thrown out onto the margins by employers’ changing strategies in the job market.

By emphasising the conflict of interests between the interests of, on the one hand, the core working class and the semi-professional classes and, on the other, those at the margins of the economy, Natrass and Seekings also claim to explain why democracy has not led to a more egalitarian distribution of income in South African society. The governing African National Congress (ANC) has its power base in the urban areas. It is particularly sensitive to the concerns, not of the vast underclass of politically demobilised and marginal rural poor and the landless unemployed, but to the needs of the urbanised working class and petty civil servants. These have a disproportionately strong voice in the shaping of government policy. Ironically, then, democracy has politically empowered not the poorest of the poor, but the almost poor, the all-but-poor, and the not-so-poor. The marginalised working class and landless unemployed, they suggest, are poor not only because of their relative exclusion from the formal economy, but also by virtue of their political marginality

within the South African democratic system. The answer to a more egalitarian income distribution lies, they argue, not in the further entrenchment of labour rights and the protection of workers, but in the adoption of policies that will encourage the creation of jobs from which the economically excluded can benefit.

Nattrass and Seekings do not quite go so far as to argue that low wages are good for the poor. Low-waged new jobs, Nattrass points out elsewhere (Nattrass 1996), may well drag down the incomes of those who already have jobs. However, their argument certainly raises important questions about the policies that are necessary to address the needs of the long-term poor. If the interests and needs of the marginal working class and those of the landless unemployed are indeed distinctive, what policies and interventions are required in order to address those needs? If the situation of the poorest sections of South African society is defined by their marginality within this society, their inability to participate fully in the labour market and society as a whole, what can be done to address this situation? If 'social exclusion' is indeed the best way of thinking about this problem, does that mean 'inclusion' is the cure? And how is such 'inclusion' to be effected?

Answering these questions will, *inter alia*, require a look at the conceptual logic of the notion of social exclusion itself. It will be necessary to make explicit some of its core assumptions and meanings, and the broader political and policy narratives of which it forms a part. This paper will however not remain strictly at the abstract level. Rather, it will also explore some of the empirical complexity of chronic poverty in Ceres and consider the implications for the concept of social exclusion as a way of making policy sense out of these facts.

Understanding livelihoods at the margin

The analysis of the dynamics of poverty is increasingly being dominated by the concepts of 'livelihoods analysis'. Murray has commended this framework for its focus on understanding the changing combinations of modes of livelihood in a dynamic and historical context, its advocacy of multi-level and multi-sectoral analysis and its focus on intra and extra-household social relations (Murray 2001).

However, he has also observed that the model should be supplemented by an adequate understanding of the broader processes within which particular household livelihood profiles and choices have their existence. This includes the need properly to understand intra and inter-household conflicts and struggles, as well as inequalities of power and conflicts and interest between communities of poor and others, such as local elites or government agencies (Murray 2001).

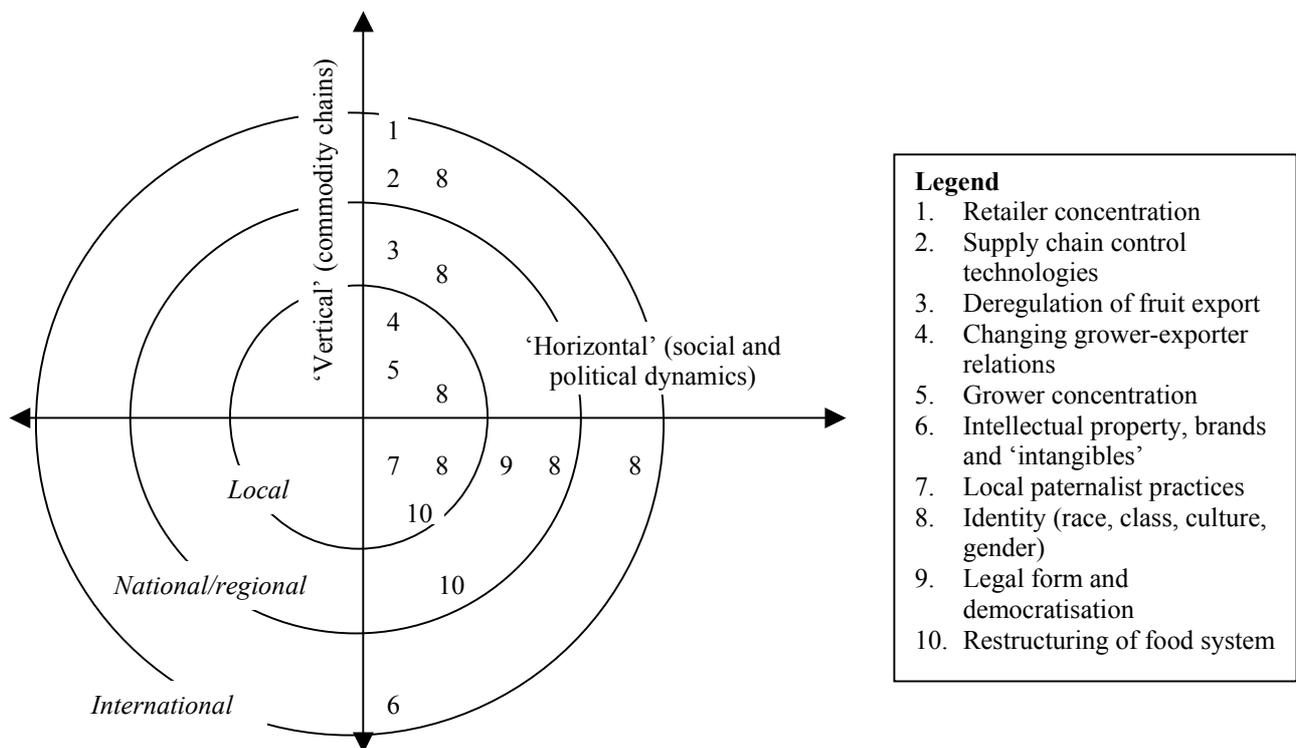
Two caveats are accordingly particularly important. In the first place, it is important to guard against any assumption that the measurement of poverty or the assessment of livelihoods can somehow proceed through a sort of simple cumulative enumeration of assets in the 'asset pentagon' of the DFID livelihoods model (DFID 2000). As Murray remarks, even 'economic' capital is best conceived of as a social relation between people. The same is true of social, human, physical and natural capitals: they only are what they are because of the broader relationships, practices, institutional frameworks and discursive formations within which they are caught up. What may count as 'social capital' or 'human capital' in one context cannot necessarily be so counted in another. For this reason even the most simple enumeration of basic household assets needs to go beyond simple quantification, and has to involve a detailed qualitative and relational understanding of social processes.

This means that research should go beyond a vague and general approach to the understanding of the issues that are indicated by the rather vague reference to 'transforming structures and processes' in DFID's diagrammatic representation of the livelihoods framework. Forms of analysis and theoretical accounts are needed that can mediate between different arenas and levels of social

process – that can link, for example, household-level micro-analyses with accounts of global, national, regional and subregional processes.

How this is done varies from context to context. In the study of a poverty in a place such as Ceres, where industrialised agriculture and export food production play such a central role, linking the micro-analysis of livelihoods to an understanding of broader global-local processes has to proceed, as it were, along two axes simultaneously, the ‘horizontal’ and the ‘vertical’ (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: ‘Vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ processes of mediation in agro-food related livelihoods



1. We may imagine the ‘vertical’ axis to involve the way in which local livelihoods are affected by the restructuring of the value chains, commodity chains and agro-food systems (for example, Kaplinsky 2000; Raikes & Gibbon 2000; Gibbon 2001) that link households to the often geographically removed places. To vary the metaphor slightly, one needs to look both ‘downstream’ (at the ways in which products are processed, shipped, marketed and consumed), and ‘upstream’ (at the relationships that are involved on the input side of agricultural production). One requires some grasp, in other words, of the economics and the politics of agro-commodity export chains and how they affect the details of labour processes and production. Key trends in this ‘vertical’ axis that directly affect agro-food livelihoods in the Ceres region, for instance, are:
 - the consolidation of retail power in the deciduous fruit industry’s target markets
 - the deregulation and restructuring of the South African marketing and export infrastructure
 - the increasing regulation of commodity chains through semi-public and private quality regimes
 - the growing importance of information technology (particularly in facilitating control and monitoring in the value chain)

- the increasing centrality of ‘intangibles’ (brands, patents, intellectual property) in shaping relations of power
 - concentration and consolidation in the packing industry after deregulation and changing local grower-packer/exporter relations.
2. But analyses have to go beyond simplistic, reductionist, unidirectional and determinist accounts of globalisation (Goodman & Watts 1994; Jarosz 1996). What happens to farm worker livelihoods in Ceres is not simply the direct result of a process of globalisation that can be described in some a priori way. How globalisation ‘plays’ in any particular situation is always locally and regionally mediated. The livelihood options of farm worker households are affected, not only by what happens in London or Brussels, but also by the realities of local and regional politics, culture and practice. As important as the ‘vertical’ analysis of the commodity chain is the ‘horizontal’ analysis of the way livelihoods are situated or embedded in a complex local social and political context. Some of these ‘localising’ phenomena that are relevant in the case of Ceres are:
- the social and cultural legacy of slave society, colonial settlement, segregation, white domination and apartheid
 - the dominant gender and racial identities (and racialised and gendered practices and institutions) within this context
 - the political dynamics of democratisation, political transition, and the provision for universal human rights
 - the changing policy and regulatory environment, including changing labour legislation
 - the transformation, restructuring and democratisation of local government.

This is a rough and approximate scheme, and not all the phenomena that affect livelihoods and poverty dynamics can be neatly categorised. The dynamics of the formal, commercial food system, for instance, are in some ways solidly part of ‘vertical’ commodity systems of their own, while at the same time also being thoroughly enmeshed in the ‘horizontal’ dynamics of local development and social process. Discursive and ideological factors such as race, class, gender and cultural identity, in addition, make their influence felt as much along the vertical, agro-food chain axis as in the context of local, regional and national politics.

3. Change in Ceres

White power in an African valley

Perhaps the best place to start, then, is with the recognition that chronic poverty in Ceres is shaped above all by the nature of the social relations that exist between those who own the land – a small, wealthy, coherent white local landed elite – and those who have to work it to stay alive. The story of these relationships is the story of slavery. Slavery shaped society at the Cape in profound ways, and left its mark on farm owners as well as workers (Ross 1983; Watson 1990; Crais 1992; Trapido 1994; Rayner 1986). Among other things, its centrality to Cape society in the 18th century helped create in a rural landowning class whose sense of itself, and whose relationship to the African countryside of the Cape was profoundly influenced by a discourse of mastery that linked white identity closely with the right to own the land, and assumed that ownership of land conferred on the owner the right to govern the lives all those who worked it. This discourse entrenched and regulated the power of a white land-owning group bound together by ties of family, political affiliation and culture.

The way in which this elite acted to secure its interests and entrench its power is complex and can only be sketched in broad strokes here. Local government and membership of the most important white political parties has clearly been central over the years, but a more subtle and in some ways more important role has been the control of local agro-food institutions, the boards of local credit institutions and banks, and the ability to use informal networks and family connections effectively. In Ceres, these have worked to create a local landed elite with a subtle but clearly marked internal hierarchy dominated by the wealthy ‘old money’ of the descendants of the very first white settlers. This local elite made effective use of the opportunities and institutions created by apartheid and its associated agricultural policies, in particular the institutional apparatus of regulated agriculture. In the 1960s and 1970s control over Ceres Fruit Growers, at its heyday the largest single fruit packing operation in the southern hemisphere, was a major source of their power within the landowning class, as was their ability to influence local land and credit markets (see Box 1).

Slavery at the Cape had its consequences for workers too. Most importantly it contributed to the development of the institutions and practices of farm paternalism. These worked to legitimate and regulate white power at farm level, and locked poor black⁵ households into highly authoritarian and deeply racialised relationships of servitude and dependence (Ross 1983, 1986; Watson 1990; Dooling 1992). These institutions did not fade away with the abolition of slavery in 1834, but continued to shape the farming styles of landowners and the strategies of survival and resistance adopted by workers and farm dwellers (Marincowitz 1985; Scully 1987, 1989, 1997; Crais 1992). By the late 20th century, the social relations of paternalism were still thoroughly entrenched on wine and fruit farms throughout the province (Nasson 1984; Schärf 1984; Du Toit 1993; Waldman 1993; Ewert & Hamman 1999). Workers continued to be profoundly dependent on white farm owners. Besides the infamous ‘tot’ system (the part-payment of farm workers in alcohol), a key role was played by workers’ dependence on tied housing. In addition, until the early 1990s, farm workers were excluded from the provisions of labour legislation and the protection of trade unionism.

Box 1: A Ceres farmer's wife's perspective on power politics among white farmers⁶

The whole economy of that community was very much controlled by a central group of people based in the farming community... It was based in certain families. And there was a passing down of power to the next generation. So it would be the Cilliers family. It would be Van Wyks of Lakenvlei. It would be Malherbes. The Conradies of Kromfontein. This is now the older generation. It would be the Goosens, in the Hamlet. In the Kouebokkeveld it would be the van der Merwes.... Not the Van der Merwes of Boplaas; the power went to the second son, who was at Bronaar. They would use... 'lieutenants' to do the groundwork, to gather the information, to lobby with the people who might be a little bit dissident. They had people operating at the Boerevereniging,⁷ at parties, at the golf club, at the church... They would have lieutenants like M*** L***. Who is not extremely intelligent, who wants to be part of the *binnekring*,⁸ and who does the dirty work for them. He would try to fish out what you are busy with and so forth.

It was a political grouping, it was definitely a Broederbond grouping and they really called the shots in terms of the appointment of officials and key people – whether it was in the co-operative, at the school, the principal, whether it was *ouderlinge*⁹ in the church, whether it was directors on the board of the Co-op.... No matter if they had good Afrikaner credentials, if [their] political credentials were wrong, they were sidelined. If someone was, for example United Party he would be very subtly disempowered though keeping him out of any position of power even though he was a highly capable man. So he would stand for the board of directors of the Co-op but he would have people phoning him at night and telling him to stand back. Otherwise there might be some repercussion on the [packing of] your fruit down the line. The officials who actually decided on the grading of the product in the Co-op have been appointed by so-and-so, so his fruit always gets graded higher, they always get better pack-outs, they always get better payments.

Out of these families you would have them on the [board of the] Land Bank. Out of these families you would have the assessors who come evaluate your property. They would be on directorships of commercial banks like Volkskas. They would also sit in directorships of the Porterville Ko-operasie.¹⁰ So they would have insight into everybody's bank accounts, debts etc etc. ... So they made sure the right people got the Land Bank loans. And that's how this lot built their wealth. That and *bandiet*¹¹ labour.

Policy and law after 1994

The end of apartheid brought important changes. Most obviously, it meant the end of the political apparatus that gave whites uncontested control over local and national government. More concretely and directly for fruit and wine farmers, political transition led to the consolidation and deepening of policy and legislative changes that had already started in the mid-1980s.

These changes are complex and multi-faceted. Suffice it to say that they involved a simultaneous process of deregulation and re-regulation. With regard to labour and social regulation, debates since the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s on how poverty and inequality are to be addressed have focused mostly on extending rights and protections to black workers and on dismantling the massive regulatory apparatus that protected white farmers during the apartheid era (NDA 1998).

A key role was played by the ANC's adoption of a broadly neoliberal economic framework under in the form of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) macroeconomic strategy, the gradual relaxation of currency controls, the phasing out of the General Export Incentive Scheme (GEIS), the tariffication of agricultural import restrictions in terms of South Africa's World Trade Organisation commitments, and the deregulation of agricultural markets through the repeal of the Marketing Act and its replacement by the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act (Bayley 2000).

In the fruit sector, this meant, most concretely, the deregulation of export markets and the abolition of what was in effect a single-desk export scheme under the Deciduous Fruit Board and Unifruco. In the Western Cape deciduous fruit industry this process led in 1998 to the dismantling of the Deciduous Fruit Board, the abolition of the single desk exporting system, the end of Unifruco's *de facto* monopoly over fruit exports, the merger of Unifruco and Outspan¹² merger and conversion into a private export company competing for fruit and markets with other South African exporters (NAMC 2000; McKenna 2000).

This was accompanied by the re-regulation of the labour market through the extension to farm workers of basic employment legislation, first through the Agricultural Labour Act (1993) and later through the Labour Relations Act (1995), the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997), the Extension of Tenure Security Act (1997), the Employment Equity Act (1998), and the Skills Development Act (1998). More recently, these were followed by the provision of a sectoral determination for minimum wages for farm workers in December 2002 and the extension of unemployment insurance legislation to temporary and seasonal workers early in 2003.

During the late 1990s, the white power structures built on the wealth generated by the fruit export industry were thus subjected to new pressures. Not only were the levers of direct political control slipping out of white hands, but deregulation fragmented the pool system that had protected farmers from risk at precisely the same time as increasing consolidation of retailer power in the fruit industry's key Northern markets put margins under pressure. Farmers who had borrowed extensively to finance further development or to restructure their orchards found themselves suddenly caught between downward pressure on producer prices from supermarkets, increasing labour and other input costs, and increasing interest rates in the wake of the 1997 Asian economic crisis. By 2000/01, economic gloom settled over Ceres district.

The local branch of Price Waterhouse Coopers calculated the average farming debt at about R7 million per 50 hectares. Land prices flattened – for a while, they were selling at half their orchard development costs – and a spate of prominent local fruit farms became insolvent. In 2002 the economic picture had stabilised somewhat – not because the industry has become any more efficient or better, but mostly because of a further 40% deterioration in the exchange rate for local currency. However, this respite was short-lived and exchange rate fluctuations have continued to contribute both to uncertainty and pressures on margins.

Re-configuring power

The effects of these changes on workers have been mixed. Though conditions for skilled, core and permanent farm workers have improved, and though small groups of workers have benefited from 'empowerment' initiatives, many farmers have responded to changed conditions by restructuring their businesses and shedding labour. It is important not to exaggerate or simplify the nature of these shifts. Labour intensity in agriculture has in any case been decreasing since the 1960s. National statistics – which are notoriously unreliable – indicate no real shift in employment, but a survey by Du Toit and Ally (2004) found evidence of an uneven but clear shift away from the use of permanent workers and towards the use of temporary, seasonal and subcontracted labour, particularly among fruit farmers. In a survey of 77 wine and fruit farms in six Western Cape districts, they found that 58.7% of farms (and 70% of deciduous fruit farms) had reduced their permanent on-farm labour force in the previous three years, while almost half of respondents (47%) indicated plans to decrease labour in the future. The effect of these trends is hard to establish, but a comparison with the research of Kritzinger et al. (1995) shows a significant shift away from permanent labour towards seasonal labour between 1995 and 2000 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison between jobs per hectare in 1995

| | Regular jobs (per ha) | | Seasonal workers (per ha) | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------|---------------------------|------|
| | 1995 | 2000 | 1995 | 2000 |
| Whole sample | 1.36 | 0.77 | 1.32 | 1.25 |
| Deciduous fruit | 1.34 | 0.56 | 0.59 | 1.12 |
| Table grapes | 1.95 | 1.35 | 2.79 | 2.17 |

Sources: Kritzinger et al. 1995 and Du Toit & Ally 2004

These shifts bring about important changes in the Western Cape agricultural labour market. Not only is there a reduction in the number of permanent jobs per hectare, but the nature of employment relations – and the composition of the labour force itself – is shifting. While only 21% of permanent jobs were held by women, Du Toit and Ally found that almost two-thirds of the harvesting labour force was female. In addition Du Toit and Ally found a significant shift towards externalisation – the provision of labour by third party contractors – with some 53% of farms indicating that they were making use of contractors. Significantly, only 17% of these farms indicated that they used labour-only contractors (in other words, contractors that act only as ‘brokers’). On the remaining 83% of farms they performed management services, so that the employment relationship was not with the farmer, but with the contractor.

In addition, they found a marked reluctance among farmers to continue to provide on-farm housing for workers, the lynchpin of traditional Western Cape farm paternalism. Some 11% of the houses on the farms surveyed by Ally and Du Toit were standing empty while 57% of farmers reported having at least one empty worker’s house on the farm. Even more importantly, significant numbers of respondents indicated an intention to demolish worker housing (21%) or to change their use (12%). These populations overlapped to some extent, but all in all, some 32% of farmers in the survey indicated an intention to abjure the traditional housing function performed by Western Cape wine and fruit farms (see Table 3).

Table 3: Farms abjuring paternalist housing function (32% of entire sample)

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Ceres | 50% |
| Grabouw | 33% |
| Paarl | 35% |
| Robertson | 13% |
| Stellenbosch | 55% |
| Wellington | 17% |
| Worcester/ Hexrivier | 22% |

Source: Du Toit & Ally 2004

Farmers tend to blame these trends on the entrenchment of workers’ tenure rights by the Extension of Tenure Security Act. Whether it is correct to see this as the central cause of this trend or not, there is no doubt that on-farm housing – once seen as an important investment by Western Cape farmers – is increasingly being regarded as a liability. As a result, workers are being moved off farms, and end up either in low-cost developments or in informal settlements around small Western Cape country towns. Interestingly, the economic upturn experienced by Ceres farmers in 2001/02 shows no sign of reversing these trends.

In fact, a look at the profile of Ceres at the beginning of the 21st century seems to indicate that the coming into power of a black majority government in South Africa has not signalled the end of white hegemony in the Ceres district or elsewhere in the rural Western Cape. True: Ceres now has a black, African National Congress mayor. But the machinery of local government has not fundamentally changed. The white elite that has run the valleys of the Witzenberg since the 18th century has not been displaced. At most, it has been somewhat reorganised. The Van der Merwes slid from their pinnacle at the top of the pecking order, and others – such as the du Toits of the Du Toit Group, which in 2002 owned more land in the Koue- and Warmbokkeveld than anyone else – rose to prominence. Politically, there is also some fragmentation. The hegemony of Afrikaner nationalism has given way to a much more complex picture characterised by formal acceptance of free market ideology and non-racialism. The language of paternalism has not disappeared, but has mutated to include in its lexicon concepts of ‘empowerment’ and ‘sustainable development’. Paternalism and networks of patronage continue to shape the life chances and livelihood options of the poor.

In this paper, it will not be possible to explore in depth the discourses and practices of local government, and to show the continuities and discontinuities with the past. Rather, attention will focus on showing the extent and nature of the continued dependence of poor households on a seasonal agricultural labour market for their survival, and the implications of this for chronic poverty.

4. Off-farm poverty in Ceres

Research approach

What do these shifts mean for the poor households who depend on industrialised agriculture for their livelihoods, and who are no longer part of the ambiguous implicit contract of paternalism? Little attention has been paid to this issue. Although policy and advocacy work in South Africa includes an awareness of the concerns and problems of farm workers, this concern has been almost entirely focussed on the situation of permanent and on-farm workers. Research on poverty and social conditions among farm workers has tended to focus heavily on permanent and on-farm workers (for example, Du Toit 1993; Kritzingner et al. 1995), and has tended to focus fairly narrowly on labour conditions (wages, conditions of employment, implementation of legislation) (Sunde & Kleinbooi 1999). The same is true of policy and advocacy work, which is dominated by NGOs and unions focusing mostly on permanent workers as a clientele, and by an overriding concern with employment relations, labour legislation and the regulation of on-farm tenure. Seasonal and ‘casual’ off-farm workers are almost invisible in the debate (for an important exception, see Barrientos 2001, Kritzingner & Barrientos 2004 and the work of the Women on Farms Project).

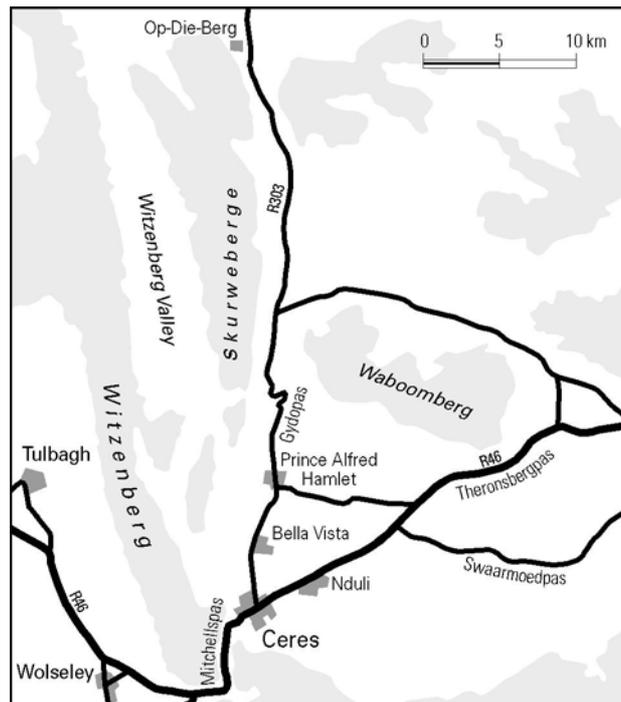
The survey discussed in this paper sought to redress this balance, firstly by focusing on off-farm communities, and secondly by investigating household livelihood profiles and outcomes in a much more encompassing way. This involved a detailed in-depth household livelihood survey of four selected poor neighbourhoods in the Ceres area. The research involved a survey covering a wide range of key livelihoods issues, including income, expenditure, household assets, access to natural resources, social and human capital, anthropometric and health-related data. This research was supplemented by a follow-up study involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected households.

The design of the survey and the interpretation of the results are informed by research insights and understandings arising from a much longer-term research involvement in the area. Since 1998 this research has involved in-depth interviews with fruit farmers and farm workers, contact and collaboration with local NGOs and trade unions, consultation in the restructuring of the fruit packing industry, and episodes of participant observation working alongside fruit farm workers in local orchards and packing houses (Du Toit & Moosa 1998; Du Toit 2000, 2001; Du Toit & Ally 2004). The target areas were selected on the basis of participatory social mapping exercises with local NGOs, local government and civil society organisations. In order to ensure some level of comparability and possibility for extrapolation with other survey data, the survey used the same boundaries as the South African Census’s enumerator areas. Four key focus areas were selected, each representing a significantly different scenarios:

1. Zone 3 in Bella Vista. Bella Vista, situated some 5km from the periphery of Ceres, is the town’s coloured¹³ township. The area as a whole as a mixed socio-economic profile, and many middle-class coloured people are still settled on the hillside facing the highway – an area known colloquially as *ou blok* (‘old block’). Out of sight of the highway, a dense settlement of low-cost, subeconomic housing has mushroomed in the last five years. This area, formally Zone 3, is colloquially known as *vaalbarraks* (‘grey barracks’) and the *kleinhuisies* (literally ‘tiny houses’ – but *kleinhuisie* also is a slang for an outside toilet). This last name refers to the nature of the subeconomic housing, which is cookie-cutter Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) format: single-brick, two-room dwellings with running water, 50-amp electricity and flush toilets, squatting in the middle of a lot of bare ground.
2. Op die Berg (literally, ‘On the Mountain’) is a ‘agri-village’ in the high valleys of the Kouebokkeveld. Originally hardly a town – just a church, a post office and a small cluster of

houses belonging mostly to local farm managers – it has seen significant expansion in the last decade as a dormitory town for locally-employed farm workers. On the north side of the river, where some retired farmers are now settled, it is still white and wealthy: the streets are wide and tarred, homes are spacious, and gardens are lush. South of the river is where coloured farm workers live. Many of them have been settled here by local farmers and still have permanent jobs on those farms. Some of the houses have been built by the farmers themselves and are much better than RDP standard. More recently, however, a large number of RDP houses have been built.

Figure 3: Map of the Ceres area



3. Nduli (literally, ‘The Hill’), 5km away along the Laingsburg road, is Ceres’s formal African township. This alone is unusual: most small Western Cape country towns do not have an African township at all. Ceres is exceptional partly because of the long-established pattern of larger farmers importing migrant workers from the Eastern Cape during harvest season. The oldest section of Nduli is the hostel area where those migrant workers were originally housed. Today the hostels no longer provide temporary housing; they house ex-migrants and their families or – in a significant number of cases – households still composed of single African men.
4. On the western edge of Nduli there is an extensive informal settlement. The largest part of this settlement is known as Polo Cross (after the polo grounds which originally existed on the site). In the last five years, a new settlement has grown up in the land between Polo Cross, the local school and the highway: this area is known as Mooibloem (‘Pretty Flower’).

Table 4: A profile of adults in the Ceres survey

| | Male | Female | Total |
|----------------|------|--------|--------------|
| Bella Vista | 174 | 222 | 396 |
| Nduli hostels | 63 | 62 | 125 |
| Nduli Mooiblom | 159 | 171 | 330 |
| Op die Berg | 233 | 262 | 495 |
| | 629 | 717 | 1 346 |

Dimensions of poverty

The nature of chronic poverty in Bella Vista, Nduli and Op die Berg are determined by a number of intersecting and overlapping dynamics.

Dependency on agriculture

The central and most important element of poverty among households surveyed was their high degree of reliance on cash incomes. This was related to a broad and severe lack of access to economic capital and natural resources. Only 11% of households in the survey indicated that they had access to land for a food garden – and this was due largely to a large percentage of households in Nduli involved in a food gardening scheme (see Table 5). Less than 1% had access to grazing land, and less than 0.5% had access to fields for cultivation. It is also notable that residents of Bella Vista and Op die Berg – the formal township developments – had less access to these resources than the predominantly African residents of Nduli and the informal shack town of Mooiblom. Some 96% of households owned no livestock of any kind. Where households did own livestock, these were mostly chickens.

Table 5: Household access to land for food production (% of households)

| | Bella Vista | Nduli hostels | Nduli Mooiblom | Op die Berg | Whole sample |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| Meadow/ field for grazing | 0.60 | 4.26 | 0.73 | 0.00 | 0.74 |
| Fields for cultivation | 0.00 | 4.26 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.37 |
| Food garden | 2.40 | 37.50 | 17.52 | 6.99 | 10.97 |

Linked to this was the relative importance of paid employment and cash income to households' general poverty status. Households reported a low level of reliance on natural resources. Outside of the collection of wood from pruned orchards as an energy source, households had to buy most of what they needed. Households that were cash-poor were unlikely to own significant economic capital, either in the form of savings, access to land for food gardening, or livestock. Cash-poor households were poor in household resources and infrastructure. (Some aspects of this lack of resources eluded measurement in the survey: while the questionnaire surveyed ownership of items like radios, refrigerators, stoves and other minor capital items, anecdotal evidence during the survey showed that some of the poorer households owned no furniture at all, living in an empty box, sleeping on scavenged sponge mattresses and using milk crates for chairs.) There was also a strong correlation between income poverty and reported food insecurity.

In the context of this lack of access to land and resources for household food production and with the absence of much linkage to a social hinterland of subsistence agriculture, it is no surprise that

the major focus of household livelihood strategies was access to cash and paid employment. Eighty percent of household income, on average, was derived from salaries, casual work and seasonal employment. In the survey, employment was identified by respondents as household members' most pressing need in 38% of cases, more than double as common as the next most prevalent identified need (housing, at 18%).

In this context, perhaps the most serious immediate and direct cause of income poverty was the insufficiency and insecurity of paying jobs. Respondents indicated that some 38.7% of adult household members below the age of 65 had no paid employment of any kind. Almost 20% of households reported that there was no person older than 18 with paid employment in the household. About a third (35%) of households reported that all adults had some paid employment – usually indicating a situation where adults held a mix of different seasonal, temporary and permanent jobs. Unemployment and job loss were far and away the two most common forms of livelihood shocks households had received in the previous year. More than a third of households reported that they had suffered 'general unemployment in the household' in the last year, 25% reported the loss of work by a breadwinner in the previous year, and 35% reported the loss of a permanent job during the last five years.

Table 6: Main sectors of employment for employed adults

| Category | Number | % |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------|
| Farmwork on commercial farm | 260 | 31.98 |
| Other unskilled | 145 | 17.84 |
| Service/retail sector | 124 | 15.25 |
| Food sector employment | 123 | 15.13 |
| Public service | 57 | 7.01 |
| Domestic work | 45 | 5.54 |
| Own employment | 35 | 4.31 |
| Non-food sector employment | 24 | 2.95 |

Where households had access to work, it was most often farm work. Almost 40% of household members with access to paid work were reported to have spent some time doing wage labour in the agricultural sector, while for some 32% of household members with paid employment, farm work was reported as their most important wage-earning activity. The next categories – 'other unskilled work' and employment in the service sector – were half as common as farm work. Some 16% of household members with employment were mainly active in the agro-food processing sector (usually employed in one of the large fruit packing houses in the region). All in all, half of the households in the survey with access to paid employment were directly linked to the fruit industry in some way or other.

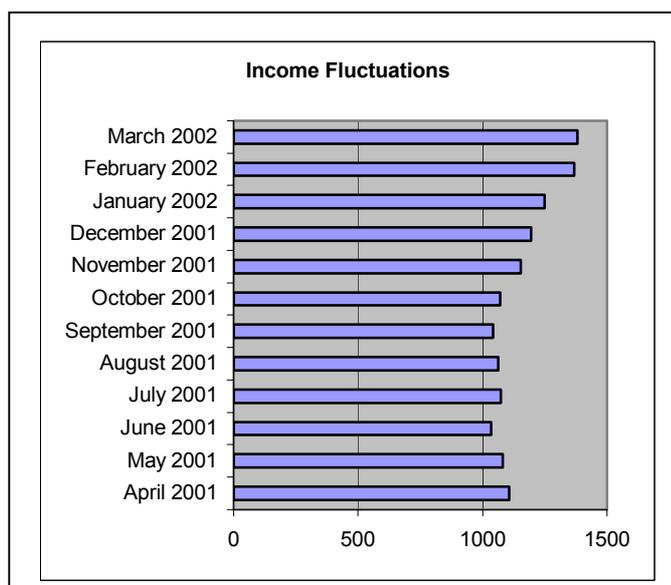
Respondents indicated that only 26% of the members of the households surveyed had access to a stable, permanent job. Households often combined permanent and/or seasonal incomes, so that some 31% of households were in some way dependent on seasonal labour for income in part of the year in one way or another, and 25% of households were entirely dependent on seasonal or temporary labour.

Table 7: Average incomes per adult equivalent, by site

| Site | Income |
|----------------|----------|
| Bella Vista | 289.7022 |
| Nduli hostels | 254.9917 |
| Nduli Mooiblom | 204.7518 |
| Op die Berg | 497.8015 |

These factors together have a depressing influence on income levels. Average incomes were some R1 174 per month – R341 per adult-equivalent household member. Just less than two-thirds of households (65.2%) were therefore below the 2002 official poverty datum line of R352 per household. These already low figures however conceal the relative variability of incomes (see Figure 3). Household incomes fluctuated by an average of 23% of maximum values, with the seasonal fluctuation in Bella Vista and Nduli closer to 40%.

Figure 4: Seasonal income variability in Ceres



Seasonal employment: power and dependency

In this context, employment in the agro-food sector played a complex and ambiguous role in the lives of poor households. An important factor here is the nature and structure of the social power relations that surround seasonal and temporary employment on fruit farms in Ceres.

Here it is important to understand that the seasonal labour requirements of fruit farmers are defined by the need to combine and reconcile divergent and sometimes conflicting imperatives. These imperatives are decisively shaped by the technical and material constraints of fruit production. Not only is fruit production characterised by seasonally changing tasks and labour requirements, within each season it is also marked by a high degree of unpredictability and risk (Du Toit & Moosa 1998). The optimal times for any task is determined by a multitude of factors, only some of which are in the control of farmers, and changing weather can play havoc with day-to-day or weekly planning. A well-planned fruit farm is set up so that the season is long (with early and late varieties) and even (with different varieties ripening in sequence, so that the same workers can deal with each in turn).

But weather and other unpredictable factors can play havoc with this sequence, so that in any harvest time any farm can at a given time have too much work (or, more rarely, too little).

In this context, the market in seasonal and temporary employment is shaped by the desire of farmers to have access to sufficient numbers of adequately skilled workers at the lowest possible price when demand is at its peak, while being able to avoid carrying any extra workers at all during times when there is no demand, or when there is no work to be done. This is not always easy. Pruning, thinning and even picking deciduous fruit requires significant care and skill. While employment in the low season is scarce, even for skilled workers, they are often in short supply during the high season. Ways have to be found to build relationships with workers between seasons, so that farm managers can be sure that workers will be available. At the same time this has to be balanced against the desire of farm owners for high degrees of flexibility, and their reluctance to enter easily into hard and fast commitments.

Over the years, in response to these needs, a wide range of labour-sourcing strategies have developed among farm managers and owners. These are shaped, not only by the exigencies of a free market in labour, but also the accidents of history, culture and geography. These have led, in the first place, to a labour market that is highly spatially diverse and segmented. In the Ceres region, smaller farmers have historically tended to carry more labour than they need for the low season and less than their peak demand, coping with these differences by swapping workers among one another as the harvest progressed. Nearby towns such as Ceres itself, Wolseley, and Prince Alfred's Hamlet have also provided farms with seasonal labour, while other farms have long relied on teams of seasonal workers trekking into the fruit farming regions from the arid and much poorer Karoo region. Many of these have settled in the area. At the time of writing, few of the farm workers living in Bella Vista are '*Ceresiete*'; they are far more likely to hail from Williston, Sutherland or Calvinia.

On larger farms, particularly in the higher valleys of the Kouebokkeveld, during the apartheid years farmers relied heavily on African migrant workers from the Eastern Cape, recruiting workers through labour brokers or 'boss boys' in the Eastern Cape, transporting them to Ceres for the season and either shipping them back afterwards or simply expecting them to make their own way back to the bantustans. 'Good' workers would often be given a token or document that would give them priority for the next season's recruitment. These patterns of employment have led to the establishment of long-range networks often linking particular farms in the Ceres area with particular villages and districts such as Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape.

The forms of the relationships with seasonal workers have also been fairly diverse. While some workers have no long-term relationships with the farms on which they work, others will be part of teams that keep returning again and again to the same farm or set of farms (sometimes the very farms from which they have been evicted or where they held permanent jobs in the past). Some farms have chosen to deal directly with their seasonal labour, employing people on short-term contracts for the duration of the harvest season.

In some cases, self-organised seasonal teams approach farm management directly. More usually, management will make use of brokers and middlemen or women to put them in touch with available workers. Then there is the trend already mentioned towards relying on 'externalised' labour strategies where workers are provided by a contractor. For farmers, the latter arrangement potentially holds significant risks and important advantages, partly because with contractors, farm management does not form part of the employment relationship. In some ways this makes control much more difficult for farmers used to the ability to command workers directly. But where quality controls can be put in place, the onerous nature of legislation and the burden of administration on the employer makes externalised labour relationships of his nature increasingly attractive to farm managers, because it allows farm management to pass on many direct and indirect costs and risks to

the labour contractor. In Ceres, some farmers have turned this into an art form, managing to make contractors responsible even for the employment relationship with on-farm workers (see Box 2).

Box 2: How contracting arrangements help one farmer externalise the costs of on-farm labour¹⁴

The labour arrangements in place at “The Grange”, a farm nestled against the Ezelfontein road running south-east of Ceres provide a good example of some of the ways in which externalisation has been used to pass costs on to labour contractors. This farm has in the last five years gone through a significant process of labour-shedding. Permanent, on-farm posts have been reduced to a third of their former level, and most of the pruning, thinning and harvesting is done by a team of workers brought back to the farm each season by a contractor, “Jacob Linnie”. The farmer negotiates overall prices with the contractor (that is, in harvest time, based on a cost per bin of fruit). From this price the contractor has to recover his or her own costs and margin as well as pay workers. Furthermore, during the season, permanent workers on the farm are formally under the control of “Linnie”. The contractor pays these workers on exactly the same basis as he pays the workers he brings in from Wolseley and Bella Vista. Furthermore, the owner of the farm invoices the contractor for the cost of the on-farm workers' provident funds and housing – effectively ensuring that off-farm workers are subsidising the salary packages of the on-farm workers.

The seasonal labour market that has resulted is characterised by highly unequal power relationships. Farmers and workers do not encounter one another in a completely open market with equal access to information. Rather, farmers pursue arrangements that allow them to pay as little as possible for the labour they need, and that allow them to displace downwards – or to externalise onto labour contractors and seasonal workers – the risks associated with the uncertainties of agricultural production. In these systems of relationship, an important role is played by brokers, mediators, contractors, and contact people on whom both farmers and workers rely for access to jobs and labour.

These relationships can take a wide variety of forms. At one extreme is the almost ubiquitous importance of family relationship as the basis of claims to get access to both permanent and seasonal employment: one of the most basic prerequisites for access to an opportunity at any workplace is to have a family member or other connection already working there. At the other extreme, for those who are able to play a decisive role in organising these networks, the rise of a contract labour market gives the opportunity of developing their own networks of patronage and power, or to extend those networks that already exist. Perhaps the most striking example in Ceres is the involvement in labour contracting of a notorious local gang known as the Red Devils. Originally a gang of *smokkelaars*¹⁵ involved in illicit liquor sales, the drug trade and extortionate moneylending, their core activities now are intricately tangled up in the labour contracting business. The 100–120 workers who are reputedly employed by them notionally earn R200 per week, but are also provided each week with food from ‘mobiles’ (small, local food vendors often doing business from a trailer) controlled by the gang – and with ‘*papsakke*’ (5-litre foil bags of low-grade wine). Not only has the infamous tot system almost literally been re-invented and adapted to off-farm use, but the contractor profits three times – from the contract with the farmer, from the sale of the food, and from the sale of the wine.¹⁶

Table 8: Households reporting ‘hungry periods’, by site

| Site | No. of households | % of households in site |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Bella Vista | 137 | 82.04 |
| Nduli hostels | 37 | 77.08 |
| Nduli Mooiblom | 104 | 75.91 |
| Op die Berg | 99 | 53.22 |
| Total | 377 | 70.07 |

Reliance on seasonal employment in agriculture therefore has important implications. It is not simply a matter of the quality and nature of its contribution to the cash incomes of poor households. It is also a matter of the role of the networks and relationships of patronage and other forms of connection – ‘social capital’, in livelihoods framework terms – that shape the ability of household members to get access to seasonal jobs. These relationships play an ambiguous role in the perpetuation of poverty. While they play an important role in ensuring basic survival, they also tie poor households into networks of obligation and power relations that in the long run may not work to their advantage.

The hungry months: The costs of seasonality

One of the most important areas of stress experienced by households in the survey related to food security. Some 70% of respondents indicated that their households had experienced a food shortage at some time during the previous 12 months. Some 25.8% of children exhibited a degree of stunting, 13.6 % were underweight and slightly less than 3% showed evidence of wasting. Interestingly, reported food shortages seemed to be more prevalent in Bella Vista – where mean incomes were higher – than in the two African settlements. This may be related to the higher dependence on seasonal labour in that community, but it could also be linked to the fact that informal settlement dwellers need less cash for municipal rates and taxes.

Hunger certainly showed a strongly seasonal character, with the number of households reporting hunger more than doubling between March and July (see Figure 6). While 27% of households did not experience any hungry months, 13% of households reported insufficient food year-round. There is also a significant clustering of hungry households around the figure of eight hungry months. Interestingly, breaking down these figures by income level shows that 38% of households in the highest income quintile still reported hungry months: the mean income level of households not reporting hungry months was R591 per member per month, or more than R2 500 per household. Respondents calculated that their households, on average, spent 43% of their expenditure on food. Overheads associated with housing – rent, energy costs, and municipal rates – cost about 20% of their expenditure.

Social capital, gender and hidden labour

In this context, the nature of the social relations within and among households plays an important role in shaping the survival strategies of household members. Four key points stand out with particular importance here.

The first is the comparative thinness of formal associational life among households in the survey. Churches and religious organisations form by far the most important formal social organisation – 78% of respondents reported that a household member belonged to one – with funeral associations (27%) and youth groups (20%) relatively far behind. Less than 6% of households reported that a member belonged to a parent-teacher association; political party membership stood at 7%; and less

than 1% of respondents indicated membership of a savings association or a community credit organisation.

Secondly, formal associations seemed to play very little role in the immediate survival strategies of households. Claims for help and assistance are based mostly on blood relationship. Questioned about whom they turned to when they needed support or help, most households indicated that they relied primarily on immediate family (67%), then family friends and extended family (17% and 6% respectively), with the next categories – employers (4%) and the church (3%) – following far behind. Qualitative follow-up interviews suggest that help could take the form of lending money, providing some basic foodstuffs, or even allowing hungry relations to share a meal. The widespread distribution of poverty, however, meant that the help available from these networks is often limited: the relations to which poor households seemed likely to be poor themselves – often help is simply not forthcoming.

The functioning of these family networks depends on context. There are some indications, for example, that one of the reasons why seasonal food insecurity in Op die Berg is less acute than in Bella Vista is that many residents are still fairly directly linked via family structures to people who are still on farms. Development workers in Op die Berg argue that these links are an important source of food (in kind) during hard times.¹⁷ If this is so, a key aspect of life in Bella Vista is not only that there is a high reliance on seasonal labour and that people are exposed to municipal service delivery charges, but that people are relatively more cut-off from networks that would allow some kind of transfer to them of the ‘fringe benefits’ of the paternalist contract.

Thirdly, the functioning of these networks is powerfully shaped by gender. Qualitative interviews seem to indicate that the essential labour of ‘working’ family connections for support is primarily done by women. Even when the family connection itself was to a paternal relation, it would usually be women who did the work of asking for help, and women who provided the help. This, of course, is far from surprising: it forms part of the broader way in which gender relations work to subject women particularly heavily to the burdens of poverty.

One key aspect of this process is the marginalisation of women within the job market. While women constituted 60% of those without any paid work, and 61% of those who were seasonally employed, men made up almost 65% of those who had permanent positions. These statistics are related to the patriarchal family ideology that maintains men’s supremacy in the household and constructs them as primarily breadwinners, and which thus legitimates the temporary nature of much female employment (Barrientos 2000, 2001). As the survey showed, this also produced a situation in which women were responsible for doing the often invisible work of household reproduction (see Table 9).

Unsurprising as these patterns are, they bear some further discussion. The relative passivity of men within the networks of family assistance and in household production is sustained and legitimised by the discourses of patriarchy and male supremacy. These discourses and ideologies form an important part of men’s ability to make use of ‘social capital’. But their implication for men seems to be ambiguous and two-edged. Patriarchal power has its ironies among poor households. The privileged status of men is linked to their notional role as breadwinners in a social and economic context where that role is particularly fragile. On paternalist farms, the discourses of mastery, servitude and masculinity interact in complex ways – subjecting male permanent workers to the authority of the white farmer, while the status of *plaasman*¹⁸ entrenches some degree of authority within the farm worker household. Off-farm, in the context of the scarcity and the insecurity of any form of paid employment, the discourses that sustain poor black masculinity are much more subject to crisis.

Table 9: Reported activities for more than one hour a day, by sex*

| Activity | Men | Women |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|
| Self-employed (non food) | 68.57% | 31.43% |
| Fetching wood | 67.00% | 33.00% |
| Food gardening | 61.26% | 38.74% |
| Other | 56.90% | 43.10% |
| Studying | 50.91% | 49.09% |
| Employment (agro-food) | 48.75% | 51.25% |
| Looking for work | 43.53% | 56.47% |
| Self-employed (agro-food) | 40.00% | 60.00% |
| Shopping | 26.62% | 73.38% |
| Homework/ Domestic work | 26.16% | 73.84% |
| Fetching water | 25.00% | 75.00% |
| Caring for children | 21.93% | 78.07% |
| Caring for aged | 21.62% | 78.38% |
| Caring for sick | 20.00% | 80.00% |
| Caring for disabled | 15.38% | 84.62% |

* Percentages refer to the total number of individuals involved in that activity

Fourthly, this seems to be at least one of the conditions for the emergence of increasingly prevalent and effective – but seriously destructive – forms of social capital in these communities: the networks and brotherhoods of gang life. This raises complex issues for social research. In the first place, an analysis of livelihood strategies underscores Murray’s warning of the internal conflictuality of community life and the existence of highly exploitative dynamics among and between households (Murray 2001). Not everything that can be listed within the ‘asset pentagons’ used to inventory household resources in the DFID livelihoods model is necessarily the kind of private or public good policymakers would approve of. It bears thinking about that, in all of these communities, the ability to use (and to survive) violence, for instance, is a key ‘capability’ or form of human capital and that, for some households, participation in criminal networks and associations is a very successful livelihood activity. Secondly, these phenomena are hidden from survey type research. So while crime – extortion, debt racketeering and the illicit selling of alcohol and drugs – are invisible in the dataset, they were clearly a prominent feature of the social scene in Bella Vista and Nduli. Anecdotal evidence from some key informants indicate that ‘*smokkelary*’,¹⁹ usually denoting unlicensed trade in alcohol, is much more prevalent as a livelihood strategy than is generally thought. In fact, it probably denotes the most common form of entrepreneurial activity among poor households.

This takes a wide range of forms. At the one end of the scale, there is ‘opportunist’ *smokkelary*, where an individual with some ready cash may get involved in selling beer or cheap wine on credit at inflated prices, for example to raise money to pay school fees or settle a municipal debt. Further along the continuum there are entrepreneurs who are consistently involved in the illicit alcohol and drug trade as a medium to long-term livelihood strategy. Their operations may be relatively informal and individual in nature, or may be more organised and centred in *jaarts*²⁰ or *smokkelhuise*.²¹ Every street in the poorer sections of Bella Vista, Nduli and Op die Berg will have one or more such *jaarts*, often surrounded by high walls, guarded by dogs, and staffed by

*jaartboys*²² who serve as bodyguards, merchants, marketers and sources of information. In some cases, some of these operators – the aforementioned Red Devils and the Garass family in Bella Vista are key examples – have become quite powerful and are widely reputed to have influence even within the local police force and Magistrate’s Court. Even more alarmingly, some of the local *smokkelhuise* have reputedly entered into a relationship with large, well-organised gangs from Cape Town such as the Americans and the Sexy Boys.

In all these cases, the existence of these forms of criminal organisation are intricately linked to the ability of local elites and entrepreneurs to make use of their own networks and relationships of clientelism and patronage. Even relatively small operators can already command significant social and human capital as well, and can be relatively influential in their immediate community, and some may even be willing to donate significant amounts of their expertise in the cause of ‘community development’ (see Box 3).

It is important to take note of the ways in which some of these networks replicate and re-invent some of the institutions of paternalism, as is so evocatively illustrated by the example of the Red Devils. This is the ambiguity and double-sided nature of these networks. It is not enough simply to see, say the structures of the Church, as benevolent and those of the gangsters as predatory. Rather, these structures contain within themselves both the possibility of assisting (some of) the poor, and significant room for exploitation and the manipulation of power relationships.

Politics, power, passivity

Finally, any account of the persistence of poverty in the townships of Bella Vista, Nduli and Op die Berg has to consider their striking cultural and political marginality. In Ceres, the most important example of this is the lack of public participation, particularly by the poor, in the formulation of the consultative ‘Integrated Development Plan’ that all municipalities are enjoined to develop in terms of local government legislation. However, this is only one example of a more general pattern of public political passivity and demobilisation.

Again, space is lacking to consider the reasons in all their complexity. The most obvious contributing factor is the abovementioned character of social relations, and the huge dependence of poor people on patron client relations, but this only one factor among many. A thorough discussion would have to consider in much more depth, for example, the way in which the farmed districts of the Western Cape have been constructed since 1994 either as sites of commercial (and therefore primarily white) agricultural activity, or commodified as a picturesque sites for ‘consumption’ by (primarily Northern and European) tourists. Closely related to this are the continuities with the legacy of spatial apartheid, including the highly racialised land tenure patterns on the farms and the persistent racialisation of public space, which lives on in the segmentation of Ceres into ‘white’, ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ (African) areas.

Another role is played by the nature of the dominant political culture in the Western Cape, and the discourses and political frameworks available for making public sense out of the needs and claims of poor people. On the one hand, there is a paternalist and demobilising discourse of development, in which poor black people are constructed as *agtergeblewene gemeenskappe* (‘left-behind communities’). This framework generally works to render invisible the power relations and conflicts that keep poor people poor, and construct them essentially as passive recipients of training and developmental largesse. On the other, there is the discourse of popular mobilisation still articulated by unions and NGOs, who are much more critical and aware of power relations, but who essentially still attempt to mobilise poor people in terms of the adversarial and confrontational political traditions of the 1980s. Important as those traditions have been in the past, they are ill-suited to new political alignments of post-apartheid South Africa, not to mention the practices of accommodation, negotiation, and ‘off-stage manoeuvring’ – the ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985) – essential for survival in day-to-day life for those lacking in power.

These factors, among others, mean that in spite of the transition to democracy and hegemony of discourses of public consultation that highlight the importance of ‘participation’, poor people in Ceres and beyond still tend to be objects of development, not agents in the process of public policymaking at national and local level. Democracy has not been irrelevant to the off-farm poor in Ceres. Development and legislation has certainly brought benefits to them. But public policy has not effectively addressed either its underlying determinants or its most debilitating consequences. In important ways, the empowering consequences of democracy has passed them by.

Box 3: Pen sketch of “Freddie Arends” – *Smokkelaar*, rebel, social entrepreneur

“Freddie Arends” is a large, shambling man, whose physical size and self-assured demeanour immediately mark him out as an outsider among the slightly built, soft spoken people of the Kouebokkeveld. He grew up in Cape Town, where involvement in gang life soon led to a term in prison. Moving to Ceres in 1999 after his release he forsook for a while the organised and violent life of the gangs and tried to make a living as a farm worker, but soon grew disillusioned with the hard work, poor pay and the domineering attitude of white farmers.

He now runs a small smokkel operation in Op Die Berg, and depicts himself as a rebel against white authority:

The reason why people smuggle is because they want to be their own boss. My reason why I smuggle is I cannot stand the farmers. I cannot understand how you can take a man's sweat and turn it into gold and put it in your own bank account.... Meanwhile I am sitting at home my wife and kids are starving. So I decide no fuck, I have responsibilities to my family.

He sells about 25 cases of beer a week from which he realises a profit of about R400 – more than twice what a farm worker would earn. Some of his profits come from his mark-ups on credit, and some from the difference between specials in Cape Town and prices in Ceres, but mostly his margin is provided by the return value of the empty bottles. He regards himself as a businessman first and foremost, couching his account of his operation in the language of modern business management and discoursing knowledgeably about ‘target markets’, ‘disposable income’ and ‘role players’. He prides himself on his sharp mind:

Ek smokkel met my gedagtes en nie met my bek nie man. (I smuggle with my thoughts, not my mouth, man).

He sees himself as a benefactor to his community and has indeed played a significant part in local empowerment and development initiatives. In the winter of 2002, he deliberately took part in a local public works project – building a bridge across the river that separates black and white in Op die Berg – and subsequently he has struck up a relationship with a local NGO, which he has started assisting in the formulation of development proposals and business plans. He is clearly very proud of his involvement here, and of the many hours of his own time that he has donated to community affairs for free:

I can work. But I just don't want to work for a farmer. I left these offices quarter past six on Sunday morning because I was helping them. Now you must think what it is for a smuggler to sit on Saturday night to Sunday morning quarter past six to develop business proposals for government for a fucking sum of money that they might just possibly get. I must be stupid, because what's happening to my bloody business? But I am willing to make sacrifices so that I can show these cunts: I too can do it. You say you are headmasters. You say you are church ministers. But not one of you is fucking prepared to give up your time for fuck all to come sit here and debate and argue and after that to write and write and then to print it out and then to submit [the proposal]. Not one of them. But they are so fucking quick to get up in a meeting and to complain about the smugglers. What I say is you get two kinds of smugglers. You get a smuggler who is a smuggler first. And you get a smuggler who is a human being first. And that smuggler is a person who is sustaining his community. Not his community sustaining him. He is carrying the community. He puts the community's interests first.'

Modernising chronic poverty

Poverty in the Ceres district – as elsewhere in the Western Cape countryside – is not new. It is not a product of globalisation and agro-food restructuring. But these processes are helping change its character, making it harsher and more desperate.

This is not without its ironies. Poverty has been a condition of existence for farm workers in the Western Cape for as long as there have been farms in this part of Africa. First slavery and then the institutionalisation of authoritarian paternalism after slavery's demise worked to lock black workers into dependence on a labour system in which they were usually harshly exploited and often brutalised. The practices and discourses of mastery and servitude inherited from slavery persisted deep into the 20th century. This legacy has decisively influenced the nature of policy debates and scholarship on inequality and poverty in the Western Cape. Discussions on encouraging equitable change and eradicating poverty have tended to see the problem in the Western Cape as being simply the persistence of these atavistic forms into modern times, and have assumed that the liberation of farm workers from poverty and exploitation basically required the completion of the project of modernisation. For commentators on the left, this would be accomplished by the extension to farm workers of industrial-style trade unionism, while for others the key force for change would be the free market.

This analysis fundamentally misread the nature of poverty, power and social relations in the Western Cape. (For a brief discussion see Du Toit & Ewert 2002.) Paternalist farming styles and the discourses of white mastery as they existed in the Western Cape at the end of the 20th century were not semi-feudal vestiges of the past; they were thoroughly modern, 'mutant formations' – and open to further adaptation and transformation under changing conditions. The underlying modernisation thesis of the policy debates was however unquestioned, and eventually policy encompassed both market deregulation and the extension of industrial-style labour relations. White farmers, politically marginalised but still holding significant amounts of social power and economic capital, were well placed to make sure that these transformations happened largely on their own terms. An unsystematic and uneven but apparently irreversible process of casualisation and externalisation seems to have been one of the most important results.

These changes may amount to perhaps the most fundamental revision of farm paternalism since the introduction of 'masters and servants' legislation in the middle of the 19th century. For a minority of workers – those skilled enough to hold on to 'core' jobs on large wine and fruit farms – these changes may be positive. But for many more workers, the shift from 'subject' to 'citizen' involves the exchange of the authoritarian racial hierarchies and ambiguous protection of the paternalist 'contract' for a formally free but even more uncertain existence as landless seasonal workers. They are out from under the control of a white master – and for some workers that is indeed a significant degree of liberation. But for those without permanent jobs and with few resources, this shift may well not mean the end of subjection to exploitative and sometimes even violent patron-client relations.

An unsettling and unsettled new landscape is emerging from these changes. The old categories – paternalism, modernisation, democratisation, development – seem to offer only a partial grip on its realities. What conceptual and theoretical apparatus will help us orient sensible policies in future?

5. Theorising chronic poverty

Poverty and social exclusion

It may be useful here to return to the notion of ‘social exclusion’ and to consider whether it helps make sense of the complex and desperate realities of long-term poverty in contexts like those discussed above.

The answer depends in part on just what we mean by it and how we use it. If we see ‘social exclusion’ simply as denoting, in the broadest sense, the idea that poor people are excluded from effective participation in social and economic life, there certainly seems a sense in which this is true of poor people in Ceres. Poverty in Ceres certainly is about going hungry. But going hungry is only one (crucial and brutal) aspect of the general way in which the state of being poor undermines the ability of poor people to participate fully in their own lives. This is a crucial and important point: although poverty does not *rob* people of agency, it certainly massively circumscribes and limits the forms of agency that are available to them. Any attempt to understand chronic poverty in Ceres should begin and end with this issue: the intimate and mutually reinforcing links between poverty (in the narrow sense) and the lack of power of poor households. The lack of the basic assets necessary for household food production or entrepreneurial activity, and the consequent dependence of households on insecure paid jobs and on networks of patronage renders them and their members profoundly marginal in the very landscape in which they play such a central role.

This marginality takes many forms. Most obviously, asset depletion and cash poverty denies poor people the ability to participate fully in a society in which acts and practices of consumption are given increasing cultural and material centrality. But this is only one of the ways in which poverty and lack of power produce and reinforce each other. It reduces them to a dependent status in complex and unequal relationships of patronage, clientelism and exploitation, and robs them of many of the resources and capabilities that they need in order to be able to claim rights and entitlements that are theoretically afforded them in democratic society. It massively narrows the circle of effective impact of households and their members on their circumstances and their society. Whatever resources and capabilities households have access to have to be used, in the first place, for the basic tasks of household reproduction and individual survival. This is a vicious circle: while a past history of effective participation builds resources and capacity for future effective participation (Gaventa 1998), the past and present political disempowerment of poor communities such as Bella Vista, Op die Berg and Nduli means they lack the political resources that can be a foundation for future engagement. And this, in turn, renders poor households much less able to challenge the other social processes whereby they are marginalised on the national stage.

Beyond inclusion and exclusion

This very broad interpretation of the concept – focusing not so much on the exclusionary processes that may cause deprivation as on the exclusionary effects of poverty itself – draws attention on the wide-ranging and multi-dimensional ways in which poverty is linked to powerlessness, the limited nature of poor people’s agency in modern democratic society, and the ways in which these realities in turn perpetuate poverty. It resonates very much with the attention Nattrass and Seekings (2001) give to the concentration of poverty among the members of the marginal working class and the landless rural poor and their relative exclusion from the centres of political power in South Africa. The question is, however, how this insight can be used to inform policy.

Here, it seems that we uncover problems. For all De Haan’s emphasis on the multiple uses of the term and on its overlaps with other paradigms such as Amartya Sen’s work on capabilities and the work of Robert Chambers on vulnerability (De Haan 1998), we have to pay attention to what is distinctive about it as a concept. And this seems to inhere mostly in its specific focus on exclusion

through some specific social mechanism, *from* some specific social good or other. Important as these dynamics may be as contributory causes to poverty in some cases (and the institutions of apartheid are a good example) there is real danger in proposing social exclusion as a fundamental underlying *cause* of poverty and chronic poverty – at least in societies like South Africa and contexts like Ceres.

This is where matters become slightly more complicated. Mention the word ‘exclusion’, and the idea of ‘inclusion’ is sure to follow. Part of the appeal of ‘social exclusion’ as a concept in policy debates is its facility in the construction of appealing and seductive policy narratives. In the EU, the identification of ‘social exclusion’ is almost inevitably linked to highly normative meta-narratives about the need for ‘insertion’ ‘inclusion’ and ‘integration’. In the UK, an example is the New Labour discourse that links – in a rather moralising way – the combating of social exclusion to the idea of ‘getting the people to work’. (Percy-Smith 2000:3, 19). Even where the concept has not been entirely institutionalised and codified in the rhetoric of public policy and government, these narratives have a stronghold.

Sometimes, and in the most general terms, this may of course be appropriate – for example when a focus on ‘social exclusion’ leads to ‘a recognition of the need for enabling policies to provide the poor or excluded with the capabilities to participate in economic growth and society’ (De Haan 1998:16). But what should these ‘enabling policies’ look like? There is a danger that we may pass too easily over dynamics that are more complex than we suppose.

Part of the problem lies in the self-confident assumption that we know what poor people need to be included in. At first glance the notion that it makes sense to talk, as the EU’s policy documents do, about people’s exclusion from the ‘normal’ activities of ‘modern’ society, may seem pretty uncontroversial. Viewed from an African standpoint, where those concepts have played an often shadowy role in the legitimisation of imperialism and colonialism, they seem altogether more shaky. Whose ‘normal’ are we talking about here? And what values and practices count as ‘modern’? How can these ideas be used in multicultural contexts, where the central ideas that define national identity are essentially contested? Who is to be ‘included’ in what? This is not merely a theoretical point. In South Africa, for instance, the simplistic assumption that development entails broadening access for the marginalised poor to the infrastructures and systems that serve the wealthy urban elite has lately been recognised to be profoundly damaging, and significantly out of step with the real needs of poor households (De Satgé 2002). It cannot be assumed that ‘integration’, ‘incorporation’ and ‘inclusion’ are necessarily panaceas for chronic poverty. Exactly how they will affect poor people depends very largely on what poor households are integrated or inserted into, and the exact ways in which economic and social power relations actually work. Facile and sweeping policy prescriptions can easily miss these details.

At the crudest level, this happens when social exclusion is given too important a causal role, or is given a crudely reductionist and economic reading. Accounts of social exclusion can all too easily form part of an analysis that sees exclusion as the result of ‘extraneous’ social factors – racism, ideology, policy or politics – excluding (or de-incentivising) particular people from beneficial participation in the workings of an economy that is seen as value-free and intrinsically neutral. This emphasis on discrimination, for example, is central in Gore’s work on social exclusion in sub-Saharan Africa (Gore 1984). In a broader sense, this is the kind of economism Raymond Apthorpe has in his sights when he questions:

the binarity of the conceptualization that assigns ‘distribution’ only to ‘social’ and ‘growth’ only to ‘economic’, denoting ‘exclusion’ as ‘social’ only and then making just ‘social exclusion’ responsible for poverty.
(Apthorpe 1999:542).

As problematic is the notion that social exclusion should be defined in terms of the ‘failure’ of a system – for example, the legal system or the labour market – which, were it functioning ‘properly’,

would be promoting civic or economic integration (for example, Shucksmith & Chapman 1998:229, citing Commins 1993). Such analyses depend on an untenable and teleological conception of legal or market relations as somehow existing outside the realm of social power, as if they can be conceived separately from the broader social relations within which they are embedded. One of the key assumptions in this paper is that such an artificial conceptual division is not useful. Markets and economies are always thoroughly social in nature, always already structured by political ideologies, social identities and contingent and contestable discursive practice. To see these as ‘distorting’ markets and economies in some way is to be in danger of becoming blind to the extent to which the existence and functioning of these markets are intrinsically dependent on the realities of conflict, unequal power relations and historical legacies of violence and dispossession.

It is certainly not helpful to try to portray off-farm poor households in Ceres as ‘excluded’ from the labour market, or to try to portray that market as having ‘failed’. Such an analysis would be so abstract as to have almost nothing to do with the reality of how that market actually works. For the white farmers who own most of the land and use most of the labour market in Ceres, the seasonal labour market is most assuredly not failing. It is working fairly well. It succeeds in providing them with the cheap labour they need when they need it, and helps them avoid some of the most important consequences of the uncertainty and unpredictability of the harvest season. The poverty, hunger, powerlessness and marginality of poor black people in Ceres is not the by-product of the ‘failure’ of the seasonal labour market. It is a result of its most central and important features. More particularly, it results, not from the *exclusion* of people from that market, but from the ways they are *included*.

Indeed, the crucial feature of what Samir Amin called the ‘Africa of the labour reserves’ is the close link between inequality and poverty on the one hand, and, on the other, the historical processes of dispossession that worked to render people dependent on a settler-dominated labour market in the first place. This has prompted some critics of dominant development discourses to prefer ‘adverse’ or ‘passive’ incorporation to the notion of social exclusion (Bracking 2003; Murray 2001). While the term ‘social exclusion’ is helpful insofar as it focuses attention on the general socially disabling effects of poverty and the consequent dynamics that in turn further entrench it, it provides a poor way of understanding the precise ways in which poor households are actually inserted into the economic power relations within which they are caught. It is tempting to argue, from this perspective, that what poor households dependent on insecure and poorly-paid jobs may require is not more incorporation, but *less* – or at least they require strategies and resources that may help them become less dependent on these labour markets in the first place.

Part of the problem here is the very simplicity and appeal of the language of ‘social exclusion’, and the assumption that it is possible to counterpose ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ in a simple or clear way. Language is important here. In this paper, the situation of poor households in Ceres above has deliberately been couched, not in terms of the language of exclusion, but of *marginality*. This is something entirely different, for what defines marginality is not exclusion, or even imperfect inclusion, but the *terms and conditions of incorporation*.

Describing and summarising these is no small task, partly because, as Gillian Hart argues, any account of these changes inevitably needs to deal with ‘how local worlds... [have] been made in quite different ways out of superficially similar conditions’ (Hart 2002). Adverse incorporation in Ceres does not work in the same way as it does in Cape Town’s African townships, Mt Frere or Lesotho. There is nothing inevitable or a priori about the way in which these processes work. They follow no predetermined path; rather, they are themselves historical and social. Outcomes and paths depend very much on the course of the processes of specific and local processes of negotiation and contestation.

At the same time, it is possible to point out some of the key themes and dynamics that shape chronic poverty in Ceres and South Africa.

1. The first and most obvious key reality underlying chronic poverty in Southern Africa is what Julian May has called ‘asset stripping’ (May 2000) – the legacy of dispossession left by colonial conquest, white settlement and slavery. As a result of this process, poor households lack direct and independent access to the natural, physical and economic resources needed for basic household food production or independent entrepreneurial activity. It is important to note that this dispossession is, under current economic and political conditions and for the purposes of policymakers, for the most part all but irreversible. For better or for worse, the measures required to effect a large-scale and fundamental re-balancing of asset distribution in the short term are unavailable, and certainly unthinkable within the narrow terms of what development agencies and international financial institutions are prepared to imagine. For better or for worse, whatever measures are available to South African pro-poor policymakers have to be conceived on a terrain defined by accepting as a *fait accompli* the massive historical inequities of a world shaped by slavery and colonial settlement. To a large extent, then, ‘adverse incorporation’ is here to stay.
2. This is intimately related to the process of monetisation – the increasing centrality of money as a source of entitlement and as a basis for access to social goods. One important driver of monetisation is the lack of independent access of households to the forms of ‘capital’ denoted by three of the five sectors of the DFID sustainable livelihoods ‘asset pentagon’. This renders them dependent on economic markets for basic needs such as food security. But monetisation is also driven by other processes. Privatisation and cost recovery policies enforced by the adoption of International Monetary Fund orthodoxies in South Africa have meant that more and more social goods are now subject to monetisation. The shift away from paternalism into the broader rural off-farm underclass is clearly a shift that involves a greater degree of monetisation. Access to services and social goods is no longer dependent on the precarious goodwill of a white farmer. It is (theoretically) a right and (practically) has to be paid for. This shift away from personal power relationships to the liberating anonymity and universal validity of money is of course empowering for those that have access to money – but it implies very real costs to those whose cash income depends on an uncertain and fluctuating seasonal labour market. Like colonial dispossession, monetisation is a deeply entrenched trend, and will not be easy to reverse or even halt. Attractive as proposals from organisations such as the South African New Economics Forum (SANE) for the development of ‘community currencies’ are, there is probably very little scope for shifting the massive centrality and urgency of poor households’ desire and demand for cash. At the same time, the impact of monetisation on some key household needs such as food security, energy, transport and other local government services can probably be minimised.
3. In this context, this means that the social relations that link poor people into broader political and societal processes are dominated by relations of patronage and clientelism. A key aspect of these relationships is their fundamentally ambiguous and double-edged nature. On the one hand, these relationships are never only and nakedly about exploitation. They often involve a degree of protection or benefit for those who are caught within them, and they also involve a significant degree of ‘consent’, or at least a link with an underlying hegemonic ideology or discursive framework which is shared by both the more and the less powerful. On the other hand, they also involve significantly unequal power relations, a huge potential for exploitation and manipulation, and ultimately work to undermine the social agency of the less powerful. Above all, they involve power relationships, processes of negotiation and accommodation in which both acquiescence and resistance, both acceptance and rejection, both brutal exploitation and accommodative negotiation, can play a role. Finally, because of all these features, they are not easily swept aside, and attempts at ‘modernisation’ very easily lead simply to their re-invention or mutation under conditions of modernity.

4. The implications and dynamics of monetisation are importantly shaped by remoteness and distance. This is a central issue for those who are concerned with understanding small-town and rural poverty in South Africa. A simple initial theoretical observation: remoteness and distance are of course not simple geographic facts. They are invested with social significance and consequence by the way in which networks, institutions and systems link people to places. For households with relatively good access to physical and natural capital, the distance to Ceres and Cape Town is irrelevant; for those whose livelihoods and needs link them to those places, remoteness is crucial. How it affects them depends on the situation. Remoteness confers advantages and disadvantages depending on how households and individuals are inserted in these broader networks. For those with access to transport, it creates livelihood opportunities such as transport and retail. For those without, it imposes costs. Above all, it links Ceres to its even more remote hinterlands: the Ceres Karoo and the Eastern Cape from which a steady trickle of desperately poor people arrive in the farmlands, willing to work for even lower wages.
5. Closely linked to the social workings of distance, remoteness and contiguity is the development of technologies of management and power. Here, social researchers can probably benefit hugely from the theorists drawing from Foucault and, more recently, actor-network theory. These theorists have explored the ways in which the workings of agency and social power are intricately interdependent with the development of complex 'social technologies' which allow for the creation of new forms of agency and new contexts of negotiation and contestation. They have in particular called for a close look at the often invisible underlying enabling conditions and practices that lead to the empowerment of some people and the relative disempowerment of others. This provides an important perspective for analysing the kinds of social agency that is available, for example, to Department of Social Development officials, labour inspectors, social workers, NGO staff and fair trade activists, just to mention a few. In all these cases, much can be learned by looking at the integration and insertion of particular individuals or groups into much broader institutional and socio-technical apparatuses and management systems. Careful attention should be paid to how this makes certain kinds of action possible while ruling out others, empowering some while marginalising or failing to empower others.
6. A particularly important sub-category of the above is constituted by the discourses and practices of government. This involves looking at much more than policy and implementation. Rather, attention also needs to be given to the underlying assumptions and strategies within which policy and implementation is shaped – the 'optic', to use Scott's term (1998) – within which poverty as a problem members of poor households are conceptualised and approached. In the South African context, this works in a paradoxical and complex way, functioning both as a potential condition for agency and a limit upon its scope. On the one hand, for instance, the transition from democracy has involved a substantial reconceptualisation of 'subjects' as 'citizens' and an insistence (for example, in the Constitution) on enshrining all manner of social goods as basic rights. On the other hand, much of the social space for agency that might be possible in a democratic 'citizen politics' is somewhat inhibited by the hegemonic conception of most poor people as passive 'beneficiaries' and 'recipients' of 'delivery'. A similar contradiction is found in the discourse around 'participation' in development and governance. While the insistence that poor people are to be seen as partners in development seems to create a huge potential space for 'action from below' and a radical citizen's democracy, the technical and institutional design of development projects often reduces 'participation' to a depoliticised process, while key decisions are arrived at by 'experts' and 'consultants'. Both these processes are linked to the tendency to see development essentially as a technical and apolitical process.

This is an incomplete and fairly sketchy account of some of the key factors that shape livelihoods and agency for those who are incorporated into Southern African modernity on unfavourable terms. All these processes and institutions work to integrate poor people into the circuits and networks of 'developed' society in ways that marginalise them, undermining their ability to control and impact upon the systems into which they are locked. And all of them are to some extent irreversibly and inextricably part of the social context in which policy has to be made. None of them can be easily discounted or swept aside. Above all, what they should illustrate fairly clearly is why it is necessary to move beyond any simple opposition between 'inclusion' and 'exclusion'. Neither a greater degree of inclusion in the South African job market nor dreams of subsistence-based independence from it capture the irreversibility of the incorporation of poor households into the broader monetised economy, the complexity of the power relations and institutions that support and undermine their strategies for survival and prosperity, or the dynamic nature of the processes of contestation and negotiation that shape the outcomes of particular interventions. Rather, fine-grained analyses and policy solutions have to be developed that are suited to the realities of life in this intermediate terrain – policies that engage with, challenge and enlarge the space for poor people's agency.

6. Conclusions

An analysis of the livelihoods of the off-farm poor in Ceres has highlighted several key issues and redressed some important imbalances. In the first place, it has shown up the importance of going beyond narrow money-metric approaches and rather considering the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. In this context, the usefulness of the concept of ‘social exclusion’ rather depends on the sense in which it is used. If we follow the lead of De Haan (1998) and see social exclusion as an aspect of multidimensional poverty, it focuses attention on the disempowering implications of poverty: how lack of access to natural and economic capital and the scarcity of paid employment work to undermine poor people’s ability to participate fully in society and limits their capabilities to secure entitlements. Care, however, needs to be taken when identifying policy initiatives to address social exclusion. This is so particularly when economic exclusion of one kind or another is seen in some facile way as a direct cause of poverty, and when our policy narratives start counterposing ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’ in simple ways. Social exclusion, as De Haan reminds us, is always part of a dynamic or a process. Considered closely, those processes are as often about adverse or disadvantageous incorporation and insertion as they are about exclusion in any simple sense. This requires that we understand, not only of household-level livelihood components, but the local, regional and global institutions, power relationships and processes that perpetuate and create that marginality. Ultimately, tackling chronic poverty requires tackling those power relations. Rather than narratives of ‘inclusion’ and integration, it may well be that what is needed are narratives of empowerment and differentiation.

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Endnotes

¹ ‘Ceres is hard, and I mean hard, but I think we will survive.’

² Roughly translated, ‘my eyesight is not what it was’. The word *gesientes* cannot be translated into English.

³ ‘The child’s father’s mother.’

⁴ ‘Previously disadvantaged community’, literally ‘the left-behind community’.

⁵ ‘Black’ here is used in the widest sense, to include all identities (coloured, African, Indian and others) excluded as ‘non-white’ by apartheid policy and discourse.

⁶ Interview with “Isabel Kroukamp”, 24 October 2001.

⁷ Farmers’ union.

⁸ Inner circle.

⁹ Elders.

¹⁰ Co-operative.

¹¹ Convict.

¹² The single-channel citrus marketing board.

¹³ ‘Coloured’ is used here to denote those people classified as such under apartheid. It does not refer, as is commonly assumed, to ‘mixed race’ people. We are all mixed race in South Africa, and many coloured people can claim a fairly unsullied African (that is, Khoisan) ancestry. Colouredness is a racialised *cultural* identity and generally refers to those black people descended from slaves and indentured servants at the Cape who were cut off, through the slave trade or genocide, from their own culture and who fashioned new, creolised identities through appropriating, translating and subverting elements of settler culture (Erasmus 2002).

¹⁴ Interview with “Jacobus Linnie”, Bella Vista, April 2000.

¹⁵ Literally ‘smugglers’.

¹⁶ Interview with “Freddie Arends”, 15 January 2003.

¹⁷ Interview with Nik Wuschlegger and Godfrey Galant, Aksent, 9 December 2002.

¹⁸ ‘Farm man’.

¹⁹ Literally ‘smuggling’.

²⁰ Literally ‘yards’.

²¹ Literally ‘smuggling houses’ – illegal liquor outlets.

²² ‘Yard boys’.