A STRUCTURAL SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH TO FAMILY POLICY: A CRITIQUE OF THE DRAFT SOUTH AFRICAN FAMILY POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

Sexist language aside, the following quotation aptly captures the power of the family:

> "The institution of the family stands in a peculiarly central, crucial position. It faces inward to the individual, outward toward society preparing each member to take his place in the wider social group by helping him to internalize its values and traditions as part of himself … It has enormous creative potential, including that of life itself, and it is not surprising that, when it becomes disordered, it possesses an equal potential for terrible destruction." (Skinner cited in De Bruyn, 1992:21)

Given the centrality of the family and the fact that the family serves as an interface between its individual members and society, it is certainly something that is deserving of special attention. The tenth annual celebration of the International Year of the Family, the focus on the development of family policy by the various UN member states and the African Union (AU) Plan of Action on the Family in Africa (African Union, 2004) are some of the manifestations of the acknowledgement of the power of the family.

The family does not exist in isolation. It is surrounded by equally and, all too often, even more powerful systems that determine to a large extent whether or not a family will live up to its *creative potential* or constitute a source of *terrible destruction*. It is thus vital that family policy is underpinned by a clear understanding of structural sources of privilege, and of the forces of oppression, exclusion and poverty that bear on the lives of people and that such policy aims to work towards social justice. The draft National Family Policy [hereafter referred to as the Policy] (Department of Social Development, 2005) claims that: "Family policies and family interventions must be based on a *careful and verified analysis* of family realities and on a comprehensive view of family life" (2005:36, author's emphasis).

This paper argues that given the conservative, residual framework within which the Policy is located, it has not been based on the kind of analysis that it calls for. The primary motivation in critiquing the Policy, albeit in its draft form, is that it is one of several concurrent discourses that reflect a move toward a right-wing conservatism. In the interests of deepening South Africa's democracy, we must be mindful of how such discourses impact on both the thinking and the material lives of people. The Policy gives the impression of being uninformed by an analysis of how factors such as race, class and gender intersect to influence access to power, privilege, status and resources in contemporary South Africa. Neither does the Policy pay any attention to the way that neoliberal capitalism and market-induced inequality, the most limiting and destructive structural forces on peoples' lives in South Africa, Africa and across most parts of the world, is impacting on family living. Given the claim that policy for family living must be rooted in a structural, social justice approach, this paper begins with a brief elucidation of what this approach entails. This is followed by a situational analysis of South Africa after 1994, with a specific focus on the impact of neoliberal capitalism and a critique of the draft national Family Policy. The paper concludes with advocacy for a universal social security provision in the form of a basic income grant for all South Africans.

A STRUCTURAL SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH TO FAMILY POLICY

A structural social justice approach to policy formulation and practice views social problems as being rooted in oppressive and inequitable socio-political, cultural and economic structures (Ife, 1997, 1999; Mullaly, 1993). The focus of analysis and change is on systems of patriarchy, capitalism, institutional racism and sexism, and discrimination on the basis of criteria such as age, sexual orientation and disability, class divisions and income distribution. It is a more radical approach to social work practice and to social policy compared with the individualist-residual and the institutional-reformist perspectives, and is thus one that is not popular among mainstream governments (Ife, 1999). From a radical point of view, which underpins the structural approach, policy and practice are not separate issues; policy and practice only make sense if they are understood in relation to each other (Ife, 1997). Practitioners and policy makers, informed by such an approach, emphasise the links between the personal and the political. The individual versus society is seen as a false dichotomy as private troubles cannot be understood and dealt with outside of their socio-economic, political and cultural contexts (Dominelli, 2004; Mullaly, 1993).

Social justice, as an intrinsic value and as a desired social goal, can best be understood within the structural approach. Ife (1999:55) contends that "...unless changes are made to the basic structures of oppression, which create and perpetuate an unequal and inequitable society, any social justice strategy will have limited value." He goes on to argue:

> "Because of the dominance of class, gender and race/ethnicity as forms of structural disadvantage, any social or political programme which does not specifically question or challenge them is likely to reinforce these forms of oppression by accepting the dominant order which supports them." (Ife, 1999:55)

Rooted in a structural, social justice approach, the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004:494-495) cites, amongst others, the following as the core purposes of social work (also applicable to family policy, which is central to social work):

- Facilitate the inclusion of marginalised, socially excluded, dispossessed, vulnerable and at-risk groups of people;

- Address and challenge barriers, inequalities and injustices that exist in society;

- Work with and mobilise individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities to enhance their well-being and their problem-solving capacities;

- Assist people to obtain services and resources in their communities;

- Formulate and implement policies and programmes that enhance people's well-being, promote development and human rights, and promote collective social harmony and social stability, insofar as such stability does not violate human rights;

- Encourage people to engage in advocacy with regard to pertinent local, national, regional and/or international concerns;

- Advocate for and/or with people the formulation and targeted implementation of policies that are consistent with the ethical principles of the profession;

- Advocate for and/or with people changes in those policies and structural conditions that maintain people in marginalised, dispossessed and vulnerable positions, and those that infringe the collective social harmony and stability of various ethnic groups, insofar as such stability does not violate human rights;

- Work towards the protection of people who are not in a position to do so themselves, for example, children in need of care and persons experiencing mental illness or mental retardation within the parameters of accepted and ethically sound legislation;
- Engage in social and political action to impact on social policy and economic development, and to effect change by critiquing and eliminating inequalities.

The above core purposes reflect that, while services to individuals and families are vital, they need to be underpinned by a structural social justice approach, with an emphasis on working with rather than for people. This paradigm is fundamentally different from the narrowly defined *service delivery* framework that is characteristic of the Policy.

The notions of both empowerment and rights are central to the structural social justice approach. Ife (1999:56) asserts that "...empowerment aims to increase the power of the disadvantaged..." and identified seven types of power essential for the empowerment of families and communities. These are power over 1) personal choices and life chances; 2) definition of need; 3) ideas; 4) institutions; 5) resources; 6) economic activity; and 7) reproductive choices. Empowerment, according to Evans (1992:141) is "...a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, political or economic power so that individuals, groups and communities can take action to improve their life situations." Torre (in Parsons, 1991) identified three themes in empowerment: 1) individual growth and development that could contribute to larger social change; 2) heightened feelings of self-esteem, efficacy and control; and 3) education and politicisation of powerless people that leads to liberation. A social justice perspective requires that rights be properly defined and that they are adequately guaranteed and enforced. The Bill of Rights in the SA Constitution, which paved, for example, the way for the Treatment Action Campaign to claim the constitutional right of HIV+ persons to health care and to life, is a good example of this. In seeking to secure and improve the rights of the poor and the disadvantaged, policy makers and practitioners must make provision for people to know their rights, to define and assert their rights, and to realise and exercise their rights (Ife, 1999). The growing inequality, consequent primarily upon the free market ideology that dominates South Africa, must form the basis for the analysis of structural sources of disadvantage and poverty in any public policy or plan of action for families.

THE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA AND AFRICA

Since 1994 the government has made significant efforts to ensure access to basic education, primary health care, water, sanitation, electricity and land, as well as in infrastructure development, and many people have benefited from this. There have also been important policy and legislative changes directed towards overcoming the discriminatory policies and practices of the past. The key anti-poverty strategies adopted by the government include: social security benefits granted on a means-tested basis; the Poverty Alleviation Fund, where the main thrust is job creation; the Flagship Programme for unemployed women with children under 5 years of age; support to small, medium and micro enterprises; and land distribution and rural development. Of all these programmes, social security has been found to have the most significant impact on poverty reduction (Economic Policy Research Institute, 2002). Given the extent of poverty and its structural causes, it is not surprising that with programmatic intervention directed towards individuals and families, *but without attention to the structural barriers in people's lives*, no sooner does one person moves out of poverty than another moves in to fill his or her place. Some of the barriers to poverty alleviation include lack of an overarching poverty-alleviation strategy; the impact of HIV/AIDS; the high rates of under-employment and unemployment; and the

consequences of South Africa's adoption of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) (Ministry of Finance, 1996).

GEAR, rooted in a neoliberal ideology, with its emphasis on fiscal austerity, cutback in state expenditure, curbing of interest rates, privatisation of state assets and lowering of trade tariffs (Adelzadeh, 1996; Bond, 2004, 2005; Hart, 2002; Sewpaul, 2004; Sewpaul & Holscher, 2004), detracts from a structural and social justice approach to community and family living. The very premises of GEAR are based on individualism, corporate competitiveness and profit-making that does not augur well for a country with a professed commitment to social justice and a developmental welfare approach. Contrary to expectations of a post-apartheid state the inequality of the past have been exacerbated and it widened the poverty gap in South Africa (Terreblanche, 2002). South Africa is now in the unenviable position of having one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world, and it is also the country with the highest rate of inequality with an individual-based Gini co-efficient of 0.73 (Statistics South Africa, 2002).

President Thabo Mbeki's pronouncements at times read as decisively Leftist. On his return from the 'Socialist International' meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil in October 2003 Mbeki said:

> "The critically important task to end the poverty and underdevelopment in which millions of Africans are trapped, inside and outside the country, cannot be accomplished by the market. *If we were to follow the prescriptions of neoliberal market ideology, we would abandon the masses of our people to permanent poverty and underdevelopment …* Poor as we might be, and precisely because we are poor, we have a duty to contribute to the elaboration of the global governance concept … *opposing the neoliberal market ideology, the neoconservative agenda, and the unilateral approach."* (Mbeki, 2003, author's emphasis)

Does the fact that South Africa has adopted the neoliberal market ideology, which Mbeki claimed to be non-negotiable in the face of civil society protests in 1996, mean an acknowledgement that *the masses of our people are abandoned to permanent poverty and underdevelopment*? There is certainly an anachronism in a state's leader proclaiming the pernicious consequences of an economic system and yet embracing it as the cornerstone of national and regional development as reflected in GEAR and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The social and economic consequences of GEAR (Ministry of Finance, 1996) have been well documented (Bond, 2004, 2005; Hart, 2002; Naidoo & Veriava, 2005; Sewpaul, 2004; Terreblanche, 2002). Instead of the additional 1.3 million jobs that were supposed to have been created by 2001, more than 1 million jobs have been destroyed since 1996 (Terreblanche, 2002). The corporate sector's obsession with first-world efficiency and high capital intensity has constrained job-creation capacities as they preclude large proportions of the population that are unskilled. Rather than to deliver on the promise of fundamental restructuring of the South African economy, the strategies adopted over the past nine years, according to Terreblanche (2002:438) have aggravated a 'deep-seated structural crisis'. Trade liberalisation has contributed to massive foreign imports with consequent large-scale local de-industrialisation and job losses. The lowering of tariffs in the clothing and footwear industry has its greatest impact on women, especially Black African women. Between 2000 and 2002 unemployment rose by 9% among African women and 6% among African men, thus further marginalising the most disadvantaged of South Africa's apartheid past. This meant an increase of unemployed African women by 757 122 and unemployed African men by 528 474 (Watkinson & Orr, cited in Naidoo & Veriava, 2005).

South Africa has one of the most skewed income distributions in the world. According to Statistics South Africa (2002), the average black African household income declined in real terms by 19%

from 1995 to 2000, while the white household income increased by 15%. The poorest half of all South Africans earned 9.7% of the national income (down from 11.4%) in 1995, while the richest one-fifth of the population earned 65%. Whiteford and Van Seventer (1999) estimate that in 1996 White per capita income was nine times higher than that of Africans. While the African share of income rose from 29.9% to 35.7% between 1991 and 1996, almost all of this increase was concentrated in the top 10% of African households. The poorest 40% of African households suffered a fall in income of 21% during this period.

NEPAD is based on the premise that there can be an equal and genuine partnership between Africa and its Western counterparts, and it does not call for a restructuring of the existing rules of the contemporary global economic system. All evidence points to the fact that this is a flawed premise (Bond, 2005; Muchie, 2003; Sewpaul, 2004). While NEPAD is touted as the African-inspired plan for people-centred development, the continent's realities remain bleak, as it reels under the pressures of free-market ideology and structural adjustment programmes. Africa's debt crisis worsened as globalisation intensified (Bond, 2004; Hertz, 2004). Servicing debt has increased ill health, poverty-related malnutrition and death. According to Bond (2004), between 1980 and 2000 sub-Saharan Africa's total foreign debt rose from US $60 billion to US $206 billion; the ratio of debt to GDP rose from 23% to 66% and Africa now repays more than it receives. Jeffery Sachs (cited in Hertz, 2004:162) at the World Summit on Sustainable Development urged delegates to: "Defend your people. It's untenable to be paying debt that could be used to fight the pandemic. It's imperative to channel those funds to AIDS, given this holocaust."

Structural adjustment has the most devastating effects on women, children, the elderly and the disabled – areas given priority in the White Paper for Social Development (Department of Welfare, 1997). The impact of this on family relationships, vulnerability to child abandonment and neglect, crime and violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse, and women's vulnerability to sexual pressures and to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, is enormous. While the draft National Family Policy acknowledges these family burdens, it does not mention the roles of the IMF, the World Bank and the roles of corrupt nation states in the perpetuation of poverty at the level of the family. Social policy analytical frameworks have predominantly been derived from work on economically privileged North and West welfare states. Thus they tend to downplay the importance of background institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, whose impacts are most devastating in the developing world. Given the consequences of globalisation and global economic competition, and the influence of these financial institutions on nation states, their neglect in national policy formulation is unjustified.

Within the neoliberal framework South Africa has seen an intensification of privatisation of basic services. Over the past ten years over 10 million people had their water and electricity disconnected on account of non-payment, and even more had their telephones disconnected, while millions have been evicted from their homes (Bond, 2004). Mass protests such as those during the World Summit for Sustainable Development and the anti-racism conference, anti-privatisation demonstrations, community protests against water and electricity cut-offs and corrupt local authorities, and the 'invasions' of vacant properties, e.g. in Bredell in 2001, are all manifestations of deeper structural problems. According to Hart (2002:306-307):

"… events in Bredell represented a crucial conjunctural moment – *a moral crisis of the state*, one that laid bare the systemic tensions and contradictions of efforts to construct a hegemonic project on the basis of neoliberal capitalism in conditions of profound inequality … Bredell exemplified not just the shortcomings of land reform or even housing provision, but the systemic crisis of livelihood associated with the collapse of formal employment, and

the palpable failure of neoliberal macro-economic policies on their own terms." (author's emphasis)

Given the forgoing discussion on the deepening structural crises and growing inequality engendered by neoliberal capitalism and the debt trap, it is inimical that neither the AU Plan of Action for Families in Africa (2004) nor the National Family Policy address these issues. A structural, social justice approach to policy formulation and programme planning might have contributed to these documents being informed by such an analysis.

CRITIQUE OF THE DRAFT NATIONAL FAMILY POLICY

The draft national Family Policy is filled with ideological inconsistencies reminiscent of an apartheid-era residual, albeit a non-racialised, ideology. The concern is that the Policy fails to take cognisance of developments after 1994 and how South Africa is creating a hugely class-based unequal society, where the majority of the poor are still African Black people. More specifically, the majority of the poor are African women, who under apartheid were subject to the double jeopardy of racism and sexism, and relegated to the very bottom of our socially stratified system, and who suffered the greatest onslaught of poverty. The achievement of political freedom has not contributed to a concomitant economic freedom for the vast majority of people in South Africa – thus the continuation of the same apartheid patterns, but in the form of class discrimination. This analysis is not factored into the National Family Policy.

The Policy adopts a conservative, morally judgemental and residual approach to family living. The Policy begins with the following situational analysis (Department of Social Development, 2005):

> "In the second decade of democracy, South Africans continue to suffer the ravages of an oppressive and exploitative legacy. The long-term effects of apartheid, migrant labour land displacement, rapid urbanisation, and poor rural development, amongst others, may require no less than a generation to redress.
> Add to this widespread poverty, escalating incidences of HIV infection and AIDS, rampant domestic violence and rape, growing sexual abuse of children, and increasing crime and drug trafficking, and hope for the future becomes even bleaker."

The above is immediately followed by: "In all of this *the Family remains the crux* of how South Africans cope – or fail to cope – in a society challenged with *rebuilding the moral fibre within individuals and amongst communities"* (2005:6, author's emphasis). There are two obvious problems with such an approach. Firstly, the burden of coping with South Africa's huge problems is reduced to the level of individuals and families, without recognition of the structural sources of unemployment, economic oppression and exclusion, inequality and poverty on people's lives, and the profound roles that society and state play in contributing to the way that families cope. Secondly, *rebuilding the moral fibre of individuals and communities* appears to be the panacea for all of the problems mentioned. The invocation of John 2:16-17 is an apt response to this: "If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?"

The document also makes *ten* additional calls for the moral regeneration of the family and society, with the use of the following language:

- Under the heading of 'Integrated Planning and Coordination' the document reads: "Providing support to and strengthening families … is an extremely challenging task, but that we have to rise *to rebuild the social fabric and advance moral regeneration*" (p.52, author's emphasis). Furthermore, the heading and the content that follow are incongruent. One would expect that

such a heading would deal with integrated planning and co-ordination across national, provincial and local spheres of government, and call for inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary collaboration;

- "Provide support mechanisms to regenerate morals in society that enhance family life" (p.53);
- "Providing information on what healthy and functional families are, and the importance of morals and values that enhance family life" (p.54);
- "… reviving of morals and values that enhance family life" (p.54);
- "… disintegration of family life impacts on the well-being of family members and leads to moral decay in families, thus affecting the fibre of society (p.56);
- "… counteract the spiralling moral decay that now threatens the very fibre of society" (p.56);
- "Morals and values that enhance family life and that ensure that the moral fibre of society is restored" (p.58);
- "Families are considered to be a key element of the Moral Regeneration Movement" (p.61);
- "… provides for a moral framework to guide the instilling of morals and values within the family that enhance family life" (p.69).

All of the above resonates with the beginning of public welfare provision that had its roots in the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation in the emerging capitalist societies of Western Europe and the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries (Sewpaul & Holscher, 2004). The growth of low-waged labour, unemployment, seasonal employment, urban slums, overcrowding, unhygienic living conditions and the perceived breakdown of traditional value systems constituted problems for the emerging bourgeoisie capitalists. Thus the need to *control* the poor for fear of the spread of violence, unrest, disease and revolutionary ideas (Clarke, 1993). Given the discursive formations in the National Family Policy, social problems such as poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS are associated with moral degeneration of individuals, families and communities. The sub-text is that: morally corrupt families lead to morally corrupt societies. Thus, the corollary to the argument is that: *rebuilding the moral fibre within individuals and communities* will ensure the *restoration of the moral fibre of society*. Such a personal-deficiency approach eludes even the more liberally oriented ecological-systems approach to policy formulation that takes cognisance of reciprocity and the mutually reinforcing influences of families and the larger socio-political, economic and cultural systems that surround them.

While the document pays cursory attention to the impact of environmental factors on family life, it more often than not stresses that 'the family is a powerful agent for political, economic, cultural and social change'. Families are also *subject to* the powerful influences of socio-political, cultural and economic factors.

The document emphasises programmatic intervention via a service delivery framework that implies that practitioners and policy-makers are experts who know best and will deliver for people. It does not call for empowerment-based practices such as consciousness-raising and reflection-in-action that facilitate families' and communities' understanding of external sources of unemployment, economic exclusion and poverty (Freire, 1970, 1973; Ife, 1997; Mulally, 1993). Neither does it call for lobbying, advocacy and social action to confront and challenge social and economic injustices. Given current rates of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, dependency and the kinds of helplessness that families are steeped in, it is unlikely that, without such empowerment-based practices, families would become 'powerful agent(s) for political, economic, cultural and social change.' There are also, undeniably, very powerful organs of the state and state resources

that are used to control the oppressed and sway public opinion in favour of state policies (Gramsci, 1971; Mullaly, 1993).

Citing Marcuse, Mullaly (1993:159) argued that, "...this hegemonic ruling process is so successful that most people cannot even conceive of any alternative to capitalism … the ruling class alliance has managed to secure through the state such a total social authority over the subordinate classes that it shapes the whole direction of social life in its own interests." Such ideological hegemony contributes to people internalising societal oppression and blaming themselves for their problems, contributing to withdrawal, fatalism, self-depreciation, helplessness or engagement in self-destructive behaviour. This, in turn, contributes to societal rejection, which reinforces the already low image that the oppressed have of themselves. Loving the oppressor and an unexplained attraction to the oppressor is another characteristic among some oppressed people (Fanon, 1964; Mullaly, 1993). This dynamic, which might be linked to the lure of the power of the oppressor, might contribute to the legitimisation of oppression.

The Policy, which is devoid of the kind of structural, social justice approach described above, overtly supports a 'goodness-of-fit' approach, with a call for *families to adapt,* as evidenced in the following examples:

"Families … are furthermore affected by external social trends, over which they have no control, and therefore, have to adapt to" (p.19).

"Families have to adapt to new strategies to counter-balance the negative effects mentioned above" (p.20). These negative effects that families are called upon to *adapt to* include: crime, substance abuse, family and gender violence, child abuse and neglect, divorce, children growing up without their parents, child-headed households, and the effects of migration and urbanisation in engendering unstable family and sexual relationships. There is no call for macro-level structural factors, described in the section on 'The impact of neoliberalism in South Africa post-1994', to be dealt with.

The Policy is supposed to be based on research commissioned by the Department of Social Development that was undertaken by the HSRC. The key recommendations of the HSRC report (Amoateng, Richter & Makiwane, 2004) are:

1. A call for a brief advocacy document highlighting the importance of the family;
2. Support at the highest level for the production of a manifesto that places families at the centre of public policy;
3. That it is the responsibility of government to support families through appropriate policies. The report notes that families are not self-reliant; that they depend on a political, economic and social environment to support their caring functions;
4. From an economic perspective it notes that "...expenditure on the implementation of policies to support families is an investment in human capital and not a cost to society ... Strong and cohesive families produce tangible returns in the form of healthier individuals and increased social cohesion" (p.xiv);
5. That family policy needs to take account of issues such as income-earning capacity and employment, housing, income tax and pension regulations, inheritance laws, labour laws and regulations, education and health policy, agricultural policy support, food subsidies and other social entitlements;
6. That family policy must include a set of "…enabling economic measures" and "…a set of societal conditions conducive to family support" (p.xv).

Most of the theoretical underpinning of the Policy is a complete replication of the HSRC report. However, the Policy does not pick up the recommendations for the production of an advocacy document or the manifesto. While the Policy makes rhetorical comments about the government's role in promoting and strengthening family life, its detail consistently advocates the residual, personal-deficiency approach in favour of *reducing the burden* on the state (Department of Social Development 2005:68). It places responsibility for quality living squarely on the family, and reflects a fear and anxiety about those undeserving poor who might abuse state resources and become dependent, as reflected in the following statements (all emphases author's):

- "It is important that families requiring such assistance are *not made dependent* on those providing assistance …" (p.12);
- Education is regarded as the "…*primary function of families*, both during the preschool years through adequate care and socialisation, and during formal schooling" (p.23);
- "… aim at encouraging families to build on their *own* resources and to overcome difficulties by relating to family networks" (p.36);
- "The policy must empower families to have *resilience* in dealing with challenges facing them, and be able to access and utilise resources. The value of *self-reliance over dependency* and learned helplessness must be enhanced. Families should therefore be *capacitated* regarding socio-economic issues, *without creating dependency*. The family should *restore its pride and dignity* in order to *reverse dependency* and the *displacement of family responsibility*. The strengthening of the *internal resources* and coping mechanisms to deal with life and its challenges needs to be promoted" (p.55);
- "The family has the *primary responsibility* to protect, care for and develop its various members, such as providing support and social and material resources. Families should ensure that they *honour their responsibility* towards their family …" (p.63);
- "…families should take responsibility, and not only depend on Government and others to provide. Families have a primary responsibility to care for its members. Only when the family fails to do so, the State and other service providers should take responsibility to provide (p.63);
- "…the responsibility for family well being rests first with the family … The State has to intervene when there is an imbalance, and families are unable to care for themselves" (p.64).

The goals of this policy framework are listed in eighteen bullet points, indicating what the policy *should* do. If this *is* the National Family Policy, it is incomprehensible why the authors frame these as 'shoulds'. More importantly is the language contained in the text that presumes the existence of external resources for families. It pathologises families with its focus on the development of inner resilience, self-reliance and on capacitating families without creating dependence. It is clearly a view that stigmatises families in distress and recipients of welfare services. If reversing dependency is a manifestation of restoration of family pride and dignity, certainly then being dependent and in need of assistance means lack of family pride and dignity. Pride and dignity are in themselves insufficient conditions to restore independence. Access to gainful employment and to necessities such as food, water, electricity, housing and sanitation will go a long way in fostering family pride, dignity and independence! The Policy constantly speaks of the need for 'self-reliance' (the kind of language often used by a state to circumvent its responsibility towards its people), while the HSRC report (Amoateng *et al.,* 2004) boldly asserts that the majority of families in South Africa are currently *not self-reliant* on account of external constraints. The pertinent question that we need to ask is: *If external socio-economic, political and cultural factors are maintaining families in poor, dispossessed and helpless positions, how are such families expected to move toward independence and self-reliance within the same structural constraints?*

Indeed, the lack of a structural social justice approach is more likely to thrust families into even greater helpless and hopeless states as they turn societal oppression into self-oppression and blame themselves for their plight.

The Policy claims that "...a comprehensive integrated social security system needs to be developed to the benefit of families" (2005:66). At the same time, it explicitly favours a means-tested residual approach to welfare services. It calls for "Screening mechanism criteria to ensure that grants be granted to those that need it most" (p.66). The Policy does not unpack what an integrated social security system might constitute and, given the growing rates of unemployment, poverty and HIV/AIDS in South Africa, it is unfortunate that it does not advocate for universal access to social security in the form of a basic income grant.

COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY: CORNERSTONE OF FAMILY POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The growing levels of unemployment and inequality in South Africa mean that the country is faced with two options to really have an impact on the quality of life of families. The first is to increase labour-absorbing capacity and ensure gainful employment for people. Current trends indicate that this is unlikely to happen. The National Family Policy relegates job-creation to the corporate sector, thus supporting a notion that unemployment is a private issue. In its delineation of the roles of the various government departments, nowhere does the report include the issue of job-creation. The role of the Department of Labour reads: "Facilitate the development and implementation of appropriate legislation for Employee Wellbeing Programmes for workplaces to support families" (2005:67). It does not address the needs of the poor who are outside of the labour force, a figure that currently stand at about 12 million people in South Africa. The Policy calls on the business sector to address unemployment. The development of infrastructure and the government's expanded Public Works programme are insufficient to create the required numbers of jobs.

In the absence of access to gainful employment, the other option to alleviate poverty and enhance the quality of the lives of South Africans is through decommodifying essential services such as health, education and water (Bond, 2005) and the development of a comprehensive social security system in the form of a basic income grant (BIG). Research commissioned by the Finance and Economics Directorate of the Department of Social Development (Samson, Lee, & Ndlebe, 2004) and produced by the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) reveals that social grants, even in their means-tested form and with their low uptake, play a critical role in alleviating poverty and in promoting social development. In supporting an extensive, universal welfare net in South Africa, the joint human resource development strategy of the education and labour departments (cited in EPRI, 2001:1) claimed that: "Extreme inequality limits the ability of individuals, households, and government to finance the enhancement of skills, education and training that are critical prerequisites for improved labour market participation, and (thus) improved income".

A BIG that addresses poverty in a developmental manner supports job-creating economic growth and increases the efficiency of social service delivery. Providing substantial empirical evidence, Samson *et al.* (2004:2) argue that: "South Africa's system of social security substantially reduces deprivation, and the progressive extension of the magnitude, scope and reach of social grants holds the potential to dramatically diminish the prevalence of poverty in South Africa."

The partial means-tested grants, according to the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI, 2001, 2002), close the poverty gap by 23% and they exclude those poorest households that do not have members receiving UIF, state old-age pensions, disability grants or children qualifying for grants.

Even with full uptake of the existing grants, for those who qualify within the designated categories it will reduce the poverty gap by only 36%. With universal coverage a BIG, most of which could be recovered through a system of progressive taxation and thus constitute a non-threatening means of redistribution, would close the poverty gap by about 74% (EPRI, 2001). Research commissioned by the Department of Social Development (Samson *et al.,* 2004) provides some compelling evidence for the developmental benefits of social security, confirming that social security must be seen as an investment in people rather than a drain on the state. The following key findings of this research are reported:

- That both national and international research reflect the positive impacts of social security in reducing poverty, promoting job search and increasing school attendance;

- Social security reduces the rates of hunger and increases nutritional outcomes, especially among children;

- Social grants are positively associated with lower spending on health care, perhaps on account of its other positive outcomes (e.g. increased access to education and to piped water) that reduces the need for medical care. The World Bank, for instance, identified the link between education and prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS;

- The profound effects of social security on labour productivity and the ability of people to find jobs. Employment in turn facilitates access to resources and promotes education, nutrition, health and other outcomes.

There is a general tendency to claim that social security grants undermine labour force participation by creating dependence and laziness. The study by Samson *et al.* (2004:4), which specifically examined this, reports the following:

- Social grants provide potential labour market participants with the resources and economic security necessary to invest in high-risk/high-reward job searches;

- Living in a household receiving social grants is correlated with a higher success rate in finding employment;

- Workers in households receiving social grants are better able to improve their productivity and as a result earn higher wage increases.

Samson *et al.* (2004:134) assert that empirical evidence demonstrates that:

> "People in households receiving social grants have increased both their labour force participation and employment rates faster than those who live in households that do not receive social grants. In addition, workers in households receiving social grants have realized more rapid wage increases. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that South Africa's social grants increase both the supply and demand for labour. This evidence does not support the hypothesis that South Africa's system of social grants negatively affects employment creation."

CONCLUSION

Given South Africa's historical legacy, neoliberal economics is not the answer to our massive problems; we are superimposing upon an already very unequal society a system that fosters poverty and inequality, which further disadvantages those already disadvantaged on account of apartheid policies. It is unfortunate that the draft National Policy is not informed by an understanding of the way that structural factors impact on family life and of how this prevents families from realising the goals of self-reliance, family pride, dignity and respect, and family

independence. In view of the massive structural inequalities facing South African society, for which there is ample empirical evidence, Terreblanche (2002) calls upon policy makers and practitioners to consider an alternative view of humanity. Terreblanche (2002:445) argues that, apart from serving the purpose of deepening South Africa's democracy, decreasing crime and violence, and promoting peace, "…redistributing income, power, property and opportunities more equally for the sake of greater social justice is a value in its own right that ought to enjoy a very high priority". A BIG is one such redistributive measure in our efforts towards promoting human rights and in working towards social and economic justice.

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