


Part III
The African Region

The three chapters in this part present a picture of some of the important variations of the region. Africa, in particular south of the Sahara, is the poorest continent, and predictions from the World Bank, UN agencies, and other economic reports hold no promises of improvement for the next generation.

There seems to be a direct relationship between poverty in a country and the occurrence of poverty research. The poorer the country, the less is the institutionalized and systematic knowledge about poverty. One explanation is, of course, that poverty research is a luxury commodity that a poor country cannot afford. Another explanation is the immature development of the social sciences in general in many of the African countries. A third explanation, which comes across strongly in the chapter on South Africa, is the fear of the political impact of poverty research. During early apartheid, official research was done only on poor whites, while research on poor blacks, i.e. the majority of the South African population, was made invisible by defining it as a non-issue. Throughout the papers it is shown that shifts in the political climate are marked by the acceptance or rejection of poverty research as a legitimate activity.

The gap in poverty research has been filled by outside agencies, such as the World Bank and non-governmental agencies, which have carried out studies on different aspects of poverty. The major definition of poverty has been economic, thereby imposing an international understanding of poverty rather than a definition of poverty tailored to national perceptions of poverty. Water, for example, stands out as a central element in an African poverty definition. Poor people have less access to clean water. Fewer of the poor have tap water in the house, they have to go a greater distance to fetch water, and the physical effort expended on carrying water requires the energy of an ordinary labourer. On top of all this, the poor are likely to pay more per litre for clean water than the non-poor. But water is not part of the regional poverty definitions.
Chapter 11
Egypt: Comparing Poverty Measures
Karima Korayem

Concepts of poverty
In poverty studies on Egypt, three definitions have been used of the poverty line: the basic needs approach, the relative income definition, and the sociological definition. The subjective definition of poverty has also been applied, but on a very small scale.

Basic needs
The basic needs approach was used in defining the income poverty line in the studies of Adams (1985), Radwan and Lee (1986), Korayem (1987a, 1994a), and the World Bank (1990b). Although the basic needs approach provides a relatively more comprehensive basis for the measurement of poverty compared with other definitions, it certainly has its limitations and shortcomings. This is reflected mainly in the arbitrariness implied in defining a household’s basic needs of food and non-food items, and in the prices used to measure a household’s expenditures on those basic needs items, because prices are dependent on incomes, on location, and on social status (Kyerem and Thorbecke 1987; Van Praag and Baye 1990). Arbitrariness is also reflected in estimating the minimum food requirements for individuals in terms of calories level and protein, because individual caloric requirements depend on several factors, such as sex, age, size (i.e. weight and height), and the type of work performed (Kyerem and Thorbecke 1987). The calorie intake needed for the average individual is also disputable, and has been falling in recent years (Lipton 1983). To overcome, or at least to mitigate, the arbitrariness of caloric intake, some studies used more than one recommended daily allowance (RDA) to estimate the poverty line; for example Paul (1989) used three RDAs in estimating the poverty line.