

Memo 17/08

Poverty alleviation

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Tuesday 20 May 2008

[I completed but did not distribute memo 15/08. Its date was 11 May which was the anniversary of the battle for Cassino in WWII in which I participated. I drew comparisons between my experiences and the present climate change situation. I doubted whether readers would be interested. Now I am sorry because all those memories have returned. I can feel the pain that these people are suffering.]



Our newspapers and TV news continue to show harrowing scenes of the conflicts in our informal settlements. Immigrants in the settlements are suffering not only from bodily beatings, but also the loss of all their meagre possessions. Those who can afford it are returning to their land of origin. Others have taken refuge in church and community halls. Outside, their shacks have been burnt to the ground. They have nothing to return to. **[Latest: 28 000 homeless – 42 dead – police cannot cope – army units deployed to assist the police in the unrest areas.]**

As you will have noticed from my recent memos, the costs of greenhouse gas emission control measures are beyond the capacity of most countries of Africa. These countries rightfully claim that poverty alleviation measures are their highest priority. This is belatedly acknowledged in the UNFCCC and World Bank announcements during the past week. However, to northern hemisphere scientists and politicians 'poverty' is no more than being poor. In all countries there is a complete lack of knowledge of the route to follow to alleviate poverty on national scales. I have attached my article ***Will NEPAD succeed?*** It was published in *Science in Africa* in June 2002 – six years ago. The website address is: <http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2002/june/nepad.htm>

Deterioration

The situation in Africa continues to deteriorate. The democratic process in neighbouring Zimbabwe is under stress. The presidential election rerun is becoming increasingly unlikely. Now the disturbances have spread to South Africa. Notwithstanding this huge societal problem, environmentalist and climatological alarmists continue with their distorted logic -- the natural environment must be preserved in its virgin state, regardless of the humanitarian consequences or costs. They still continue with their unscientific and wholly unpatriotic tactics. Worst of all, they refuse to become involved in the very difficult task of seeking solutions.

Next week, an international conference on biodiversity will be hosted in South Africa. *African Geographic* has also organised conferences in Cape Town and Johannesburg within the next fortnight. The discussion panel excludes those with rational views despite requests from members that it be more balanced. This refusal to share platforms with scientists who hold opposing views is a characteristic of climate alarmist tactics. All of this is while thousands of people are suffering in our informal settlements and millions of people in Africa are suffering from poverty, malnutrition and disease. This misplaced elevation of environmental concerns above human welfare concerns will not go unnoticed.

Descent into anarchy

The extent and suddenness of the rioting came as a deep shock to the South African authorities. From what I read and hear in the media, there seems to be no appreciation of the root cause of the problem and its solution. There are reports in the archives that should assist in pointing in the right direction.

What has happened here in South Africa during the past ten days is a symptom of a much deeper disease. It exists to various degrees in many African countries. According to the latest news reports there are 15 cross-border conflict situations in Africa; internal conflicts in another eight countries, underlying conflicts in 12 countries, and relative stability in only 13 African countries. There is a very real danger of the situation becoming worse in the years ahead. I described this possibility in my United Nations commissioned study ***Risk and society – an African perspective (1999)***. This is a prophetic extract from my report published nine years ago..

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Pattern of impoverishment of the rural poor

Disasters are not increasing because of the increase in the frequency of hazards, but due to the increasing vulnerability to hazards. The increase in vulnerability to disasters in many developing countries of Africa arises from the following repetitive sequence.

1. Growing population.
2. Increasing utilisation of natural resources.
3. Land clearing.
4. Felling of trees for firewood.
5. Overgrazing of fragile ecosystems especially in semi-arid areas.
6. Soil erosion.
7. Desertification.
8. Collapse of natural ecosystems.
9. Hunger and malnutrition.
10. Partial recovery after the drought has passed, and the cycle is repeated

The downward trend of impoverishment will continue unless this cycle is broken. If conditions continue to deteriorate, the rural population will be attracted to urban areas on the assumption that their living conditions will improve.

11. Migration to the cities by rural poor and refugees.
12. Unplanned occupation of high risk peri-urban areas.
13. Few job opportunities, and rising crime rate as a means of survival.
14. Breakdown of civil administration.
15. Political instability.
16. Civil war.
17. Cross-border conflict.
18. Anarchy.

These symptoms are present in many African countries.

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As shown above, many African countries have already reached level 17 on this scale. South Africa has reached level 13 and heading towards level 14 in some areas. Zimbabwe has reached level 15 and moving towards 16. Now perhaps you will appreciate my anxiety associated with my scientifically based prediction of severe droughts in the immediate future. These will be superimposed on the already stressed conditions. Can you imagine the consequences?

Why is mine a lone voice in the wilderness?

Politicians and the press are speculating about the causes of the violence including a mysterious 'third force' that is intent on destroying our country. They should be searching for solutions and not apportioning blame. The greatest obstacle to seeking solutions is that there is no scientific body that has shown the slightest interest in coordinating research on this problem that affects millions of people on our continent. Compare this with the proliferation of South African research institutions and bodies involved in environmental and climate change research.

I urge overseas recipients of this memo to compare all the above information with the edicts of the Royal Society and other once esteemed British institutions. They have done their best to suppress contrarian research instead of encouraging it. The same happened at Bali, where those of us who held opposing views were prevented from expressing them. Now the world's poor are starting to suffer from the suppression of research on natural climatic extremes and their consequences.

A further tragedy is that developing countries can no longer trust the research produced by research institutions in the wealthy nations. A good example is the Stern Review. It was obviously politically motivated. The review completely ignored submissions from Africa that contradicted its mandate.

Poverty-stricken Africans should not expect any Christian charity from the wealthy nations of the UK and EU. These countries are the historical cause of our poverty and are now obstructing its alleviation.

Towards a solution

Once the situation has stabilised, I will distribute copies of two important reports that are in the public domain and suggest some possible long term solutions to this critical issue. They should also be of international interest. The first and most important requirement that the authorities will have to make is a very firm decision that human welfare concerns **MUST** receive priority over environmental concerns.

The second is the urgent need to establish an independent scientific body with a mandate to evaluate climate alarmist theory emanating from international as well as South African sources. This will include an evaluation of the IPCC assessment reports. It is fundamentally important that South Africa should establish its own independent, multidisciplinary research base. We should not have to rely on the views of a few vociferous scientists who make alarmist statements on matters outside their fields of expertise, or the obviously politically motivated research from many international bodies.

In the meantime I appeal to local climate alarmists to get off our backs so that we can devote our energy to seeking solutions and not have to waste our time exposing their unscientific nonsense.

Nkosi sikele Africa.