



## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4. PRIVATIZATION OF WATER SYSTEM AND POVERTY:

*“I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me”  
(Matthew 25:35-36).*

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Africa has become the poorest continent in the last four decades. One in four people in this region cannot afford basic shelters or the minimum food requirements for an active and productive life. Most families in Africa live on less than US \$1 a day. Our governments spend millions of dollars actually to service debts, which have not benefited us. The argument is therefore that trade can help reduce poverty levels in developing countries, with the implementation of national and international policies that are development driven.

Corporate globalization is enabling corporations to steal from the poor their last resources, their seeds and biodiversity, their food and water, their land and forests. As predatory and non-sustainable models of economic development spread worldwide, species are pushed to extinction, rivers and glaciers are disappearing, and millions are uprooted from their homes, displaced and left impoverished.

Public goods such as water, health care and transportation are privatized, which makes them even less affordable. Peace and



security are in decline, while preventable diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS are spreading out of control. Meanwhile, African countries are threatened by problems from the inside, such as corruption, mismanagement, violence conflict, and spread of deadly yet preventable diseases, exacerbating the issue of poverty. These enemies, which are predominant in Africa, have been created by unjust political and economic systems that operate in our continent.

Privatization of water system, biodiversity and genetic resources are patented and land is taken over by force for industry, mines highways and ports (Asling 2004:66) leaving people to abject poverty. Up to three million people in Africa do not have access to safe drinking water or sanitation. In many nations, homelessness is a severe problem, affecting even children. For example, even though the bill of rights of South Africa guarantees access to adequate housing as a basic right, the unfair distribution of resources often leaves many people without the shelter, water and other basic services they need. Throughout the continent, many others face the same hardships as recorded by Anna, Elena Obando in her November 2003 paper entitled, Women and Water Privatization that:

- 2.5 billion people do not have access to improve sanitation, i.e. two fifth of the world's population, do not have access to adequate health.
- 1.2 billion people in the world's population do not have access to an improved source of portable drinking water, i.e. the sixth of the world's population.



- 2.2. million people in developing countries are dying every year, most of them children from diseases linked to the lack of access to clean drinking water, inadequate health and poor hygiene.
- 6000 boys and girls die everyday from diseases linked to the lack of access to clean drinking water, inadequate health and poor hygiene.
- The average distance a woman in Africa, Asia and Latin America walks to collect water is 6 km.
- The weight of water that women in Africa, Asia and Latin America carry on their heads is equivalent to the baggage weight allowed by airlines (20kg)
- In developing countries one person uses an average of 10 liters of water per day, while in the United Kingdom, one person uses an average of 135 liters of water everyday.
- When you flush the toilet, you are using the same water amount that one person in the Third World uses all day to wash, clean cook and drink.
- In the last ten years, diarrhoea has killed more girls and boys than all people who have died since the World War II.



- The population of Nairobi, Kenya, pays five times more for one liter of water than does North American citizen.
- Billion people in the world are suffering from parasite infections due to solid waste in the environment, which could be controlled with hygiene, water and sanitation. The infections can cause malnutrition, anaemia and delayed growth. ([http: www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-water.html](http://www.whrnet.org/docs/issue-water.html))

This chapter will focus on the issue of privatization of water system in the context of poverty.

#### **4.2. DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTION OF POVERTY**

Poverty is a difficult concept to define. It is relative, though many international organisations including the World Bank attach to it a clear and concise definition. For the World Bank, poverty is a yardstick for her to determine countries that require aid.

To say someone is poor, “we normally refer to economic poverty, meaning that the one person has very little or no money with which to buy some basic needs” (Mobbie 2005:62). In the light of this, this author quotes the Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defining poverty as “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possession” (2202:62). He also quotes the Concise Oxford Dictionary that simply defines poverty as “being insufficient in amount” (2005:62).

Citing May and Govender, Pieterse defines poverty as “the inability of the individual households, or entire communities, to command



sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable standard of living” (2001:30). This definition by Pieterse underscores the World Bank’s idea that poverty is the inability to attain a minimal standard of living.

This understanding of poverty however, does not state who determines the living standard for the people. Could a person from United States of America or from Europe say that people in Bushbuckridge are poor because they cannot afford a Mercedes Benz? These definitions of poverty are not informative enough, as they restrict poverty to lack of money, at the exclusion of other needs such as material assets, safe drinking water, etc.

The term “poor” therefore covers, besides economic poverty, the unjustly deprived, the impoverished, the oppressed, the unfortunate, the afflicted, the needy, the destitute, the widow, the orphan, and even the stranger, all of whom are objects of God’s special protection. Poverty may also involve social exclusion from decision-making, social services such as water, electricity, etc.

In attempting to clearly underpin the definition of poverty, the World Bank outlined some descriptive aspects that embrace the various facets of poverty. For the World Bank therefore, poverty is hunger, a lack of shelter, being sick and unable to see a doctor and lack of water because of its privatization and that one cannot afford to pay. Poverty is not being able to go to school and not knowing how to read and write. Poverty is not having a job. It is the fear of the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child due to ill health brought about by unclean water and one



cannot afford medical fees. Poverty is powerlessness, a lack of representation and freedom.

These descriptions of the various aspect of poverty clarify it. It captures the person's context and experience. Poverty is therefore, contextual and experiential, consistent with its relative nature. In agreement with the World Bank's description of poverty, Pieterse wisely states that "What poverty means is the poor's own experience". He goes on to apply the experiential dimension where he applies it to the South African context where he quotes Wilson & Ramphela defining poverty as "a state of not knowing where the next meal is coming from or fearing eviction from their meagre dwelling because they cannot pay the basic rental. There is also a fear that the breadwinner will lose his job" (Pieterse 2001:30).

As seen above, there are many ways people understand or define poverty. Poverty depends much on the defined-standard of living in a particular society. For instance, what is defined as poverty in the first world may turn out to be wealth in the third world. Generally, poverty refers to the economic condition in which people lack sufficient income to obtain certain minimal levels of life such as health services, food, housing, clothing, education and water resources. These are generally recognized as the necessary requirements to ensure an adequate standard of living. What is considered adequate, however, as mentioned above, may depend on where an individual lives.



In South Africa for example poverty means:

- Pregnant women so weakened by malnutrition that their babies are stillborn or die very soon after birth.
- Small children with swollen bellies, sores oozing pus, faces wizened and drawn like those of old people.
- The gnawing ravenous hunger of the semi-starved
- The aching anxiety of wondering where the next meal will come from
- The pain of watching a granny waste away on a diet of weak tea because what little food there is must go to the children
- The fear of being asked to share food with kinsfolk or neighbour

And in time of drought and when water is privatized, poverty means:

- thirst and the daily desperate search for water
  - trekking from 3.00am to 6.00am to a distant borehole
  - queuing and waiting for many wearisome hours
  - sometimes having literally to fight for a share of the meager trickle
  - trudging back in the heat with the precious but burdensome load
  - And repeating the process next day and the day after, for weeks and months with no end in sight. (Nash 1984:9)
- One can therefore see that there is a strong link between poverty and lack of water.



In his doctoral dissertation, Buffel's co-researchers define their understanding of their reality of poverty, what it is and how it negatively impacts the poor and the marginalized.

In the following table, Buffel records the verbatim definition of each participant's understanding of the reality of poverty that:

P	Definition or understanding in each participant's words
A	Poverty is a condition in which you find yourself and in which you cannot afford basic things that you need and you cannot live without those basic things. Poverty deprives one of normal life that other people around you are leading.
B	Poverty is a situation in which you have no food for clothes and other basic things afford basic things that you need and you cannot live without those basic things. Poverty deprives one of normal life that other people around you are leading
C	Poverty is a condition of life in which there is suffering as a result of failure to have certain basic requirements such as food and clothes, school fees, school uniforms and money for transport to and from school.
D	Poverty is the environment in which one is unable to afford things such as food, clothes, water and electricity. Sometimes one does not even have money for transport for children to go to school. One is also unable to provide for one's own house.
E	Poverty is when you have nothing, when you cannot properly provide for the needs of your family. You struggle to give them decent meals and decent clothes. You struggle when you have to send your children to school.
F	Poverty is condition of life in which you lack basic necessities of life such as food, clothes and decent housing. Poverty closes doors for opportunities. It is like a trap in which a person is trapped, in which you



	are helpless and hopeless.
G	I understand poverty to be circumstances in which you are and you cannot provide for the basic needs of your family such as food, clothes, transport to and from school. Sometimes you do not even have a house of your own.
H	Poverty is an inability to afford the basic necessities of the family such as food, clothes and sometimes water and electricity. There are times when we cannot afford prepaid water and electricity.
I	Poverty is a situation in which one struggles to provide for the basic things that are required for the survival of the individual and family. It could also affect the whole community and country.

*P stands for participants and each of the alphabet A to I stands for each participant instead of using a name: Source: Buffel 2007: 106-107*

It therefore becomes clear to the reader that from the definition and the description of poverty by Buffel's co-researchers here above, in South Africa and other developing countries poverty can be defined as: "not having enough to satisfy a basic need" (Nash 1984:57).

Poverty, as described here above has many different facets namely: lack of food, lack of energy supplies, distribution of land, lack of income, ill health, insecurity and uncertainty, inadequate housing, commuter transport and lack of water (Nash 1984:57-62). In this dissertation, the researcher will briefly discuss the three facets, i.e. lack of food, lack of water and lack of energy leaving the other facets of poverty for other researchers to pursue.



#### 4.2.1 LACK OF FOOD

The right to food as recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that is sufficient, safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable. This access to food right is not necessarily to be understood as merely being given food through aid, but it means access to an income base either through disposing of productive resources such as land, water, seeds, livestock reed, fish stocks, and work. If neither of these is possible, then the person, household or the community is regarded as living in poverty.

People living under these conditions are vulnerable to all kind of diseases as Nash succinctly puts it “Since 1966 malnutrition diseases like Kwashiorkor have not been fortifiable, therefore no one has exact statistics. But there is general agreement that malnutrition is a very serious problem in South Africa” (1984:124) for years there has been serious development of malnutrition in developing countries of third world and South Africa in particular. As a result, too many children died of starvation or of hunger- related diseases like kwashiorkor, pellagra, gastroenteritis and measles. This also added to the poverty experienced by the poor in developing countries. This is one facet of poverty that affects the continent besides brain draining (nurses, doctors, engineers, etc) and unemployment, etc.

This poverty is exacerbated by the existing inequality and the consequent violation, of almost all human rights the World Bank and the International Monetary fund have imposed. i.e.



the privatization of water services on several countries as a condition to grant them loans.

In per capita terms South Africa is an upper-middle-income country. Despite this relative wealth, most South African households experience the outright poverty. They continue to be vulnerable to extreme poverty everyday. The distribution of income and wealth is among the most unequal in the world. Many households have unsatisfactory access to education, healthcare, energy and clean water. The question to ask is why the lack of these basic necessities in a country with enough mineral resources including rivers, dams and reservoirs.

#### **4.2.2 LACK OF WATER:**

Today, billions of people around the globe lack access to the most fundamental foundation of a decent civilized world, namely basic sanitation services and clean drinking water. According to United Nations (UN) officials, the shortage of water in many countries arises from poor management in the preservation of water, pollution, inefficient use of underground water and lack of awareness by their people.

According to the 1999 World Bank strategy report, the bank played an important role in charting South Africa's privatization strategy. It has provided technical assistance and policy advice in virtually all sectors of the economy and promoted the increased participation of the private sector in the development of infrastructure.



The World Bank was doing this in the name of helping reduce apartheid legacy of poverty and inequality. Unfortunately, this did not turn out that way. It ended up with the introduction of several policy changes such as the cost recovery strategy, which introduced credible threat of cutting service to non-paying consumers.

With regard to privatization of water resource, Figueres has this to say: “Two common concerns that can be challenged are that the market approach which will result in the poor being cut off from water supplies and that their health will suffer (2003:48). This is a fact that does not need challenging. What a serious disadvantage to the poor.

The researcher views this as a sin that deeply violates God's goodwill, God's steadfast love for life, for human beings, the whole of creation and ecosystem earth. Pieterse reminds his readers that when people are impoverished they usually resort to crime for their livelihood (2001:39). Poverty is therefore, a contributory factor to escalating criminal activities in South Africa.

The author challenges the church that the integrity of her faith is at stake if she remains silent or refuses to act in the face of the current system of water privatization and neoliberal economic globalization, which subordinates and reduces everything to economic profit.



In South Africa this kind of poverty i.e., lack of water affects people in different ways and to different degrees. In some informal settlement such as Crossroads in Cape Town, people walk 200 metres to fetch water from a communal tap. In rural areas people may walk for 5km to a borehole and still get no ground water since water table sometimes fall. This results in women and children queuing for long hours even at night in order to get water. Some end up drawing water from rivers where cattle, donkeys, goats and other animals also drink resulting in the outbreak of malaria and related waterborne diseases. (Nash 1984:58)

The vast majority of people in this area live in rural areas, and many poor people make their living in urban slums all across this region. Some predictions say that two out of three people in the world will face a water shortage by 2025. Yet the potential of water investments as a tool for reducing poverty and building sustainable livelihoods has not been fully realized.

A lot of water in the area of research however, is left to flow freely from rivers to the sea. For example, Rivers such as Olifants and Klein Letaba near Phalaborwa, Sabie and Sand Rivers in Hazyview, Crocodile and Komati Rivers in Nelspruit and Komatipoort respectively, Blyde River, Great Letaba and other tributaries flowing from the Drakensberg mountains to mention but a few. Water from these rivers should be harvested, harnessed and stored in dams for future use by people, animals and environment.



The government however, is faced with the reality that sooner or later there will be no water for human consumption, industrial operations as well as agricultural usage. In order to better utilize the water resources, call have been made to take water control and regulation away from the government to private companies.

The Mpumalanga Province has been one of the first such areas where water was privatized in Nelspruit areas (about 300km east of Johannesburg, RSA) some few years back ([www.psimu.org](http://www.psimu.org)).

In most of the rural areas, water has been freely available for local consumption as well as for irrigation in small farming sector. In fact people have been drawing water from the rivers without having to pay for it. Now, due to persistent drought, the government has been forced to build more water storages and to lay pipes to the local communities. In the process, water metres are being installed in the households to ensure that those who use water pay for it.

In rural areas malnutrition and death of children from starvation from hunger, kwashiorkor, pellagra, gastroenteritis and measles is rife. This, as Maluleke explain can only be solved by encouraging people to establish vegetable gardens and produce crops such as spinach, beans and tomatoes (Maluleke 1993:28). Adequate water supplies is therefore a fundamental need to the people and to the poor



in particular, but at places where water is paid for (privatized), starting such projects is rather impossible.

#### **4.2.3 LACK OF FUEL / ENERGY SUPPLIES**

It is very important for the reader to understand that when sharing about fuel or energy supplies, the author is not referring to fuel to fly fighter jets, move trains or motorists, but the fuel /energy needed by countries poor people for cooking and keeping themselves warm (1984:59). These are some of the things that impoverish the African continent.

### **4.3 DIFFERENT KINDS OF POVERTY:**

The Encarta Encyclopaedia identifies the following two types of poverty, relative and absolute. Relative poverty is that experienced by those whose income falls considerably below the average for their particular society. Absolute poverty is that experienced by those who do not have enough food to remain healthy. However, estimating poverty on an income basis may not measure essential elements that also contribute to a healthy life. People without access to safe drinking water, education and health services should be considered poor even if they have adequate food.

#### **4.3.1 Cyclical Poverty:**

This is the type of poverty that is widespread throughout the population but its occurrence is of limited duration. This type of poverty may be influenced by business cycle, depression or recession. Once the situation has normalised, poverty is ended.



#### 4.3.2 Collective Poverty:

This refers to the long term or permanent insufficiency of means to secure basic needs, such as water, food, education, health facilities due to lack of income. This is related to economic underdevelopment. It is mostly found in the third world countries where communities struggle to get the basic means of survival.

In South Africa for example, the following data as quoted by Pieterse from a study of the literature on Poverty by Theron (1992:186) is an example of **collective poverty** where by 2001:

- A total of 500 million people were starving.
- Two billion did not have clean or adequate water.
- One billion were living in dire poverty.
- Five hundred million were unemployed or earned less than R300 per annum.
- As many as 814 million were illiterate.
- For 1,7 billion life expectancy was less than 60 years. Most of whom die around the age of 45, if they do not incur a fatal disease before that (2001:32)

#### 4.3.3 Concentrated collective poverty:

This is the type of poverty that can be found in highly industrialised areas with informal settlements or ghettos where people are attached to the cities but do not belong to its economy. They live in these situations because they feel if they are closer to the industrial or agricultural areas would



benefit. They are normally people with low education and skills, which cannot be used by the industries in their neighbourhood. They cannot afford to pay for water bills, electricity, rental, education for their children, and even to be sure of their next meal, etc.

#### **4.3.4 Case Poverty:**

Case poverty refers to the inability of an individual or family to secure basic needs even in social surroundings of general prosperity. This inability is generally related to the lack of some basic attribute that would permit the individual to maintain himself. Such categories of persons include the helpless aged, the blind, the physically handicapped, the chronically ill, and the chronic mentally ill. Physical and mental handicaps are usually regarded sympathetically, as being beyond the control of the people who suffer from them. Again, in developing countries, these people do not afford to pay for their water bills, electricity, adequate food, rental, etc.

#### **4.4 UNDERSTANDING POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In order to understand the current situation of poverty in South Africa, we need to go back beyond the 1994 dispensation. Since the dawn of new democracy, and when the homelands system collapsed, a number of developments followed. Rapid urbanization took place faster than the government could think. The reasons for this are that when the homeland system collapsed, the so-called border industries, which were established within the borders of the homelands or in the boundaries along these establishments, also collapsed.



As these were intended to keep the dream of homelands alive, they were heavily subsidised and paid very low salaries. When subsidies ended and protection against labour movements disappeared, the owners left. It is ironical that the majority of such industries were of the Oriental origin. These left the rural areas, which have now been incorporated into the new South Africa, dry and poorer.

The other fact was that, once all the restrictive laws were abolished, people from the rural areas were tempted to move to big cities where it is generally believed that chances of job opportunities are more promising.

The prospect of owning a house in the cities also improved. One had to first build and live in a shack for a while so that when the Provincial Government comes to do counting of those who should qualify for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses; they should find them already resident in the area. In many cases, a lot of people have to pay exorbitant amounts of money to get access to the informal settlement so that they can also be counted as part of the community. This act makes the poor even poorer.

The mushrooming of informal settlements in and around the major cities has not brought about any improvement but has worsened the situation of millions of poor people. The cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town are all surrounded by hundreds of thousands of shacks with squalid conditions. Here there is no service delivery such as water and



sanitation, electricity and collection of rubbish bins etc. Most people living here are unemployed and always engage in unbecoming activities such as stealing, prostitution etc.

#### **4.5 UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY**

It is not easy to separate unemployment from poverty as the two are interlinked. The legacy of apartheid in the South African context produced employment dependent society, particularly among the black people. The type of education system for the black people was that which produced good employees and not people who would make their own businesses or create employment for themselves and others. Those who were unemployed remained poor and without the basic necessities of life.

The other issue is that the former government had excluded over 80% of the population from the economic plans of the country as they had planned to dump them into what was called homelands and make them independent, so they sad, while in fact the idea was to divide and rule. The new government therefore has an enormous task of incorporating them into the economy in order to alleviate poverty.

Robin Gurney, in his book, The Face of Pain and Hope, in the chapter dealing with Germany post the cold war, depicts the state of the unified Germany. The country did not expect to deal with the massive unemployment crisis. The West Germany economy had to accommodate people from the East who had never experienced unemployment in their history because of the Communist history



(1995: 54 – 58).

This is the situation South Africa finds herself in. The influx of illegal immigrants and refugees from the neighbouring states because of the deteriorating economies and conflicts is not making the situation easier for the government. The already impoverished millions of South Africans have to compete with foreigners for employment who are prepared to accept any form of remuneration. Many profit-driven employers would rather prefer to employ foreigners so as to ensure that, at the end, they (employers) get more profit from their businesses.

The debate around the percentage of unemployment in the country indicates the grave situation the country finds itself and to get the figure, will depend on who is telling or sharing about the above information. For those who want to highlight the seriousness of the issue place it at more than 46% and those who try to paint a better and optimistic picture they share that it is at 26 - 30%.

#### **4.6 AGRICULTURE AS AN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

Where people are unemployed and impoverished as discussed in this chapter, they need a way to sustain themselves and a way to come out of the poverty trap.

Two – thirds of humanity depends on natural resources for their livelihood and meeting basic needs. They live in an economy connected to the land, water, and biodiversity as their primary capital, and their means of production and their economic security.



Ecological destruction, erosion, pollution, or privatization of these vital resources translates into poverty and underdevelopment by robbing the poor of their sources of livelihood in land, water and living resources. It also squeezes them out of their own land.

In many Africa countries, agriculture is an important source of livelihood for those who are unemployed. It is an important source of livelihood for the poorest of the poor who have no source of cash income, and those for whom self-employment is an important income source and who are the most well-off in terms of income and assets. Many of these cultivators are women, for whom agriculture is one of the several livelihoods being undertaken. Water supply makes a massive difference to the lives of the unemployed. More aspects of poverty are addressed when there is water available. In this regard, water should be provided for productive as well as consumptive use.

Today, 70 percent of the world's water is used for crop irrigation. As the population grows, irrigation land is expected to become increasing significantly in feeding people. The impeding water crisis due to its lack of privatization will push many croplands to the brink of disaster, as there will be insufficient water to irrigate our food crop. This will also increase the level of poverty among people.

## **4.7 THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF POVERTY**

### **4.7.1 The New Testament approach to poverty**

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus made it very clear that his ministry was that which identified with the marginalized.



By quoting from the Old Testament reading, Isaiah 61:1 – 3, Jesus clearly identified two issues regarding his ministry, i.e. a) The preaching of the Word (The Good News, Gospel) and b) The caring to the marginalized. This approach to ministry is in line with the summary of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 22:34-37) and can also be found in Luke.

***“The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight of the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”  
(Luke 4:17-18).***

Jesus points out one very important aspect of his ministry, that he is inspired by the “Spirit of the Lord.” This implies that his ministry was inspired from above. At the beginning of the Christian Church, the apostles found it very difficult to separate the two issues. Their priority at the beginning of their ministry was to spread the gospel, but very soon they learned that the widows needed attention as well. They had to appoint a special team to address this aspect (Acts 6:1 – 7) The Church of Antioch, was also touched by the famine in Judea.

They then collected relief aid and sent it to the brothers and sisters in Judea. This inspired Paul to the extent that when famine was reported in Jerusalem, he had to go all out to encourage the brothers. Perhaps, more than any other



church in the New Testament record, the church in Antioch provides a good model of holistic ministry. It was a compassionate church. When famine in Judea took place, every believer in Antioch “The disciples, each according to his/her ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29).

The history of the Christian Church, as early as the apostolic times has always incorporated service to the poor in its structures. Churches such as the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches have taken the Diaconate ministry as part of their mission. The ministry of the Church should be twofold: The church should look upon to God, vertical relationship, and to our neighbours, horizontal relationship. The Word and Service; in the New Testament the poor are referred to as the needy, indigent, the poor who are meek and calm.

James says Faith and Deeds go together. He puts it very interestingly that: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If anyone says to him/her: Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:26).

Indeed these passages of scripture quoted above, challenge the Church of God to work for elimination of poverty. The



Church is challenged to advocate on behalf of poor people for access of basic water resources.

#### **4.7.2. The Old Testament understanding of poverty:**

From the Holy Scriptures, it is very clear that poverty is as old as humankind. Already, early in the Old Testament time, we are told that laws were made to protect the poor. The Old Testament teaches us that God had always been on the side of the poor, and showed particular biasness towards them. James Cone is correct in his contention that “God has not ever, not ever, left the oppressed alone in struggle. He was with them in Pharaoh’s Egypt, is with them in America, Africa and Latin America, and will come in the end of time to consummate fully the human freedom” (1975:137).

There is abundant evidence that the poor existed among the Hebrews. “But the seventh year you shall let it rest and life fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the animal of the field shall eat. In like manner you shall deal with your vineyard and with olive grove” (Exodus 23:11).

*“For the poor will never cease out of land: therefore I command you, saying, You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your needy, and to your poor, in your land”* (Deut. 15:11).

In the book of Exodus, God was touched by the cries of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt and remembered the covenant He had made with Jacob (Ex. 2:23-25). It is very important



to note that poverty at that time was not associated with begging. The laws were made to provide for the poor; therefore Children of Israel were advised not to reap everything from their land during harvest but that they should leave some parts of the land so that the poor could come and reap for themselves. As there was food available from these lands, there was no need for anybody to go out and beg (Lev. 19:9-10). The reader should note that greed was not part of Israel's life. Today we face people who do not care about other people.

This concept of looking after the poor as recorded in the Old Testament can be found in most of the African communities. Poverty has been an issue that the African communities had always taken very seriously. No family was allowed to die of poverty when there were neighbours who could rescue them. In the rural villages, rich families would lend their cattle to poor families. They would provide a small team of oxen to plough the land and also lent milk cows to provide milk for the family. This process paid itself back by the poor families helping to look after the cattle and making sure that they multiply for the owner. In return the owner would pay them with one cow for every year they had the animals. At the end, the poor person is helped to transform from poverty. This is where the concept of "**Ubuntu**" (i.e. I am because you are) worked.

The following issues can be observed with regard to the Mosaic legislation regarding the poor:



- They had the right to gleaning the fields (Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-21)
- In the sabbatical year they were to have their share of the produce of the fields and the vineyards Exodus 23:11 and Leviticus 25:6)
- In the year of jubilee they recovered their property (Leviticus 25:25-30)
- In the year of jubilee they recovered their property (Leviticus 25:25-30)
- Usury was forbidden, and if it happened that a garment was taken as collateral, it should be returned as soon as possible before the sun went down. It was not even allowed for the borrower to enter the house to demand for collateral;

***“If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not regard him as a creditor; neither shall you charge him interest, If you take your neighbour’s garment as collateral, you shall restore it to him / her before the sun goes down, for that is his / her only covering, it his / her garment for his / her skin. What would be sleep in? It will happen, when he / she cries to me, that I will hear, that will hear, for I am gracious” (Exodus 22:25-27, Deuteronomy 24:10-13)***

- The rich were to be generous to the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)
- In the sabbatical and jubilee years the bond-servants were to be freed (Deuteronomy 15:12, Leviticus 25:39-42, 47-54)



- Certain portions from the tithes were assigned to the poor, (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; 26:12-13)
- The poor were allowed to share in the feasts (Deuteronomy 16:11,13; Nehemiah 8:10)
- Wages were to be paid at the close of each day (Leviticus 19:13)

The story of Naomi also gives us some ideas about poverty. After the death of their husbands, Naomi and Ruth are obliged to return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19) and, as two widows without family take them in, they are vulnerable and poor. Ruth resorts to the exercise of her right to glean in order to get food to eat (Ruth 2:2-3).

Ruth gleaned unintentionally into the field of Boaz, a relation of Naomi's husband (Ruth 2:1, 20). He is generous to her in allowing her to glean in the main part of the field instead of only the edges as the law provided (Ruth 2:7,9). He also provided her with food (Ruth 2:14) and drink (Ruth 2:9b). Also he acted as her protector from being molested by men (Ruth 2:9b). Boaz goes on to buy Naomi's husband's land for her and take Ruth as his wife, thus providing security for the two widows and rescuing them from their poverty. Life in those days was not driven by economic prosperity which has people to isolate others.

In his presentation in the book entitled Towards African Christian Maturity, Wynnand Amewowo takes us through the Old Testament understanding of Poverty. He points us to



the Wisdom literature; Psalms, Proverbs, Sirach Ecclesiastes, that clearly indicates that God is on the side of the poor. The enemies of the poor are the enemy of Yahweh (Ps. 18:28), and the poor person is the friend and servant of God (Ps 86). This is clearly demonstrated by Cone when he says “The cross of Jesus reveals the extent of God’s involvement in the suffering of the weak. He is not merely sympathetic with the social plan of the poor, but becomes totally identified with them in their agony and pain. The pain of the oppressed is God’s pain, for he takes away their sufferings as their own, thereby freeing them from its ultimate control of their lives (1975:175).

Again, Cone puts it into perspective that: “The poor are Yahweh’s own, his special possession. These are the people the divine has called into being for freedom. Therefore as the sovereign King of Israel whose saving power, Yahweh judges Israel in the light of their treatment of the poor” (1975:69).

The poor person is the friend and servant of God. Like Cone, Wynnand continues to define the term “poor” as something that covers, besides the economic poverty, the unjustly deprived, the impoverished, the oppressed, the unfortunate, the afflicted, the needy, the destitute, the widow, the orphan, and even the stranger, all of whom are objects of God’s special protection. He further says, “Not every poor person merits the title of the poor of Yahweh, the poor with



disposition of humility, fear of God, with faith and fidelity merit the name of the poor of Yahweh (1987:59).

Bishop Desmond Tutu is very vocal about the fact that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. In the book of Job, the same sentiment is echoed about God's favour towards the poor (Job 34:28). Again, in the book of Zephaniah, the poor are described as the meek and the humble or lowly people. The Prophets are God's messengers who defend the poor and denounce exploitation (Zeph. 3:12ff). In all the examples given, water played a crucial role in the alleviation of poverty through irrigation.

The Bible is rich with examples of how God's people have responded in times of crisis or difficult times. Devastations and death due to poverty, typhoons, floods, fires, revolutions, and droughts are phenomenal that occur now and again all over the World. They are experienced in rural areas, urban areas as well as the slum areas of the cities. How is the Church responding to this?

According to the scriptures, the suggested answer to this question is that every local church/congregation, at the very least, should be involved in the fight for the poor; the Church has the Biblical mandate to respond to human needs in all manifestations. To ignore this responsibility is to deny the Lordship of Christ over the Church that is the incarnation of Christ. The failing of world economies, globalization, mismanagement of natural resources, such as water, global



warming creates massive calamities to millions of people especially the poor.

The Church has to be moved with compassion at the sight of human misery because of privatisation of water and leaving millions of poor families without the basic commodity. The church has a responsibility to advocate on behalf of people like it was the case in the Old and the New Testament.

The Church, as part of the people, is uniquely placed to be part of the suffering of the communities:

- It is already on the ground among the poor and therefore is able to see the poor even before the governments and other powers start understanding the suffering of the people. The Church is not the buildings but the people and therefore when people get poor it is the Church that is hurting.
- The Church, despite its parochial tendencies at times, is still a reliable screening body to identify needy peoples in the community in collaboration with the local authorities.
- On a long-term basis, the local Church serves as a natural infrastructure for follow-up. Development agencies and government departments can come and go but the local Church remains with the community and has the potential to monitor the process.



The churches' involvement in the day-to-day lives of the community, the relief of those who suffer the injustices created by the wrong policies of government and local authorities, can be powerful witness to Christ, the head of the Church.

#### **4.8 SCARCITY OF WATER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

In the bible, human beings have been experiencing droughts since the very earliest times. The bible refers to poverty when there was drought and famine as a result of the scarcity of rains. Drought (which the author prefers to use exchangeable with famine though the two are not exactly one thing) was sometimes caused by natural disasters, but very often it was caused by God who used it to get the people's attention, as a reminder of just who has the power to turn it on for those who obey Him, or off, for those who have gone their own way. Following are two examples:

***“The Lord will open to you His good treasury the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and bless all the work of your hands” These are the blessings of obedience (Deut.28:12)***

***“And the anger of The Lord be kindled against you, and He shut up the heavens, so that there be no rain, and the land yield no fruit, and you perish quickly off the good land which The Lord gives you.” (Deut. 11:17)*** These are the curses of

disobedience.

Drought as experienced in the biblical stories, and that we experience in modern time particularly in Africa can be explained as an extended period of months or years when a region notes a



deficiency in its water supply. Generally, this occurs when a region receives consistently below average precipitation. However, man can also worsen the effects. It can have a substantial impact on the ecosystem and agriculture of the affected region. Although droughts can persist for several years, even a short, intense drought can cause significant damage and harm the local economy.

For most regions, drought is a normal, recurrent feature of the climate, and having adequate drought mitigation strategies in place can greatly reduce the impact. Recurring or long-term drought can bring about desertification; for example, the recurring droughts in the Horn of Africa have created grave ecological catastrophes, prompting massive food shortages, still recurring. This kind of change in climate has added in increasing poverty, because people are no longer able to plough their land.

To the north-west of the Horn, the Darfur conflict in neighbouring Sudan, also affecting Chad, was fuelled by decades of drought, desertification and overpopulation are among the leading causes of the Darfur conflict, because the Arab Baggara nomads searching for water have to take their livestock further south, to land mainly occupied by farming peoples.

#### **4.9 CONSEQUENCES OF DROUGHT**

Period of drought that can have significant environmental, economic and social consequences include:

- Death of livestock
- Reduced crop yields.



- Wildfires, such as the once experienced in Mpumalanga, Kwa-Zulu in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) in 2007 are more common during times of drought.
- Desertification
- Dust storms, when drought hits an area suffering from desertification and erosion
- Malnutrition, dehydration and related diseases.
- Famine due to lack of water for irrigation.
- Social unrest.
- Mass migration, resulting in internal displacement and international refugees.
- War over natural resources, including water and food.
- Reduced electricity production due to insufficient available coolant.

The effect varies according to vulnerability. For example, subsistence farmers are more likely to migrate during drought because they do not have alternative food sources. Areas with populations that depend on subsistence farming as a major food source are more vulnerable to drought-triggered famine.

Drought is rarely if ever the sole cause of famine; socio-political factors such as extreme widespread poverty play a major role. Drought can also reduce water quality, because lower water flows reduce dilution of pollutants and increases contamination of remaining water sources.

Moby Thesaurus define drought to mean: “absence, appetite  
define drought to mean: “absence, appetite, aridity, aridness,  
beggary, canite appetite, corkiness, defectiveness, deficiency,



deficit, deprivation, destitution, dryness, emptiness, empty stomach, famine, hollow hunger, hunger, hungriness, imperfection, impoverishment, incompleteness, juicelessness, lack, need omission, polydipsia, relish, saplessness, shortage, shortcoming, shortfall, starvation, stomach, sweet tooth, taste, thirstiness, torment of tantalus, want, wantage, waterlessness, watertight integrity, and watertightness. (<http://onlinedictionary.com/word/drought>)

These words, therefore, describe what it means not to have water. During this time there is no food for people, no grass for animals as there is no water for human and environmental needs (Gen 41:29-30, Ruth 1:1, 11 Sam 21: 1, 1Ki: 8:2; 11Ki: 6:25; 11Ki: 25:3 and Act 11: 28). The effects are devastating and lead to poverty. In all these references, people had to relocate to other places to start new life where there was rain (water). It is here where they can grow maize, wheat etc, and where they will be enough feed for their flock (Ruth 1:1) The absence of water is tantamount to the absence of life and poverty prevails.

An example can be cited as reported by Nash when giving the background on rural poverty to the August 1983 Northern Transvaal churches workshop.

We are reminded that throughout 1983 and early 1984 most of the country (particularly the six (6) homelands of the Republic of South Africa) had been in the grip of drought, the worst in 200 years. The summer rains had failed in most areas.



Many parts of the country had been without rain four three (3) or four (4) seasons, where in semi-desert Namaqualand there were children of six (6) and seven (7) years old who had never seen rain. The land was scorched and denuded of vegetation. Rivers and boreholes yielded meagre trickles or failed completely, cattle died or sent to abattoirs, donkeys destroyed to conserve what little grazing and fodder remained. Countless thousands of people lacked the barest essentials of life, namely water and food. Poverty became the order of the day. In other words, where there is lack of water, poverty becomes part of life.

For city people, the drought exposed pathetic conditions of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, illness and disease afflicting the black population in rural areas. For shareholders in business who depended on black rural customers, especially food and furniture (often on hire purchase) it brought reduced profit and a policy of diversifying into high technology enterprises which so far have been noticeably more “drought resistant”.

For customers it had brought increased General Sales Tax (GST) and for taxpayers a heavier burden in order to meet massive state deficits and foreign loan debts. In its ravages in Maputo, the drought contributed to that country’s willingness to sign the March 1984 Nkomati Accord, but there was little doubt that the drought had also exacerbated and made more visible the internal contradictions of the defence – burdened South African economy.



In rural areas short term relief measures in the form of new or deeper boreholes, feeding schemes and relief works for payment were instituted and doubtless saved many lives.

The need of such schemes, however, disappeared, yet very often the need is as great as ever. For in reality the drought did not create a temporary problem of rural hunger and poverty.

Rather, it intensified and exposed the deepening but often hidden crisis of survival being suffered by millions of black South African, particularly those in rural areas.

The RSA Department of Health and Welfare estimated that two (2) million children in South Africa excluding the homelands suffered from malnutrition and nearly 400 died of it each year. (Nash 1984:13–14). How sad and pathetic it is to note that to date in some villages of the Limpopo Province of the Republic of South Africa, women and girl-children still queue for long hours in private household with boreholes where they pay R25-00 for a drum of water (SABC: Morning Live news: 2007-08-08).

How many poor people can afford the R25-00 to buy water? The news continue to picture women and children resorting to getting water from wells, springs, dams sharing it with donkeys, cattle, and other wild animals resulting in deaths from water-borne diseases.

Unfortunately, in 2007 the above story coincided with the celebration of the Women's Day month when the South African women celebrated their freedom after their walk in protest against



the pass laws in 1956. Women in Limpopo can ask genuine questions as to whether they should participate in the celebration or not, given the above circumstances where even the little water available at some areas is privatized, impoverishing the poor even more.

As experienced in the South African story above, the shortage of water yields poverty and has a negative impact and effect to our social life. Today, the impacts of climate change e.g. The Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina of 2004 and 2005 respectively also exacerbated poverty.

The table below summarizes the social, environmental and economic impact and effects of the shortage/scarcity of water resource.

<b>IMPACT</b>	<b>RIPPLE EFFECTS</b>
<b>SOCIAL</b>	<b>IMPACTS</b>
Lack or poor distribution of resources (food and water)	Migration, resettlement, conflicts between water
Increased quest for water	Increased conflicts between water users
Marginal lands become unsustainable	Poverty, unemployment
Reduced grazing quality and crop yields	Overstocking; Reduced quality of living
Employment layoffs	Reduced or no income
Food insecurity	Malnutrition and famine; Civil strife and Conflict
Increased pollutant concentrations	Public health risks
Inequitable drought relief	Social unrest, distrust
Increased forest and range fires	Increased threat to human and animal life
Urbanization	Social pressure, reduced safety
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL</b>	
Damage to natural habitats	Loss of biodiversity
Reduced forest, crop, and range land productivity	Reduced income and food shortages



Reduced water levels	Lower accessibility to water
Increased daytime temperature	Increased fire hazard
Increased evapotranspiration	Crop withering and dying
More dust and sandstorms	Increased soil erosion; Increased air pollution
Decreased soil productivity	Desertification and soil degradation (topsoil
Decreased water resources	Lack of feeding and drinking water
Reduced water quality	More waterborne diseases; Increased salt con
Increased incidence of animal diseases and mortality	Loss of income and food; Reduced breeding
Soil desiccation	Increased soil "blow ability"
Degradation of landscape quality	Permanent loss of biological productivity of the soil
Species concentration near water	Increased vulnerability to predation
<b>ECONOMIC IMPACTS</b>	
Reduced business with retailers	Increased prices for farming commodities
Food and energy shortages	Drastic price increased; Expensive/
Loss of crops for food and income	Increased expense of buying food from shops
Reduction of livestock quality	Sale of livestock at reduced market price
Water scarcity	Increased transport costs
Loss of jobs, income, and property	Deepening poverty; increased unemployment
Less income from tourism and recreation	Increased capital shortfall
Forced financial loans	Increased debt' Increased credit risk for finance institutions

[http://drought.unl.edu/risk/world/impacts SA.htm](http://drought.unl.edu/risk/world/impacts_SA.htm)

#### 4.10 RAIN MAKING FOR AGRARIAN PURPOSES:

In some other cultures, the concept of rainmaking or rain dancing has been associated with the agrarian rural communities for decades.

Ceremonial dances were performed in many cultures, from the ancient Egyptian to 20th-century Balkan, to invoke rain, ensuring an abundant harvest. Because most primitive dances have the same goals—life, health, abundance, power—it is not unusual for phallic and other fertility dances to be performed as rain dances.



Thus, the Hopi Indian rain dance includes holding live venomous snakes in the mouth, an apparent phallic gesture.

Agrarian cultures, including the Mayan civilization and that of ancient Egypt have most commonly employed rain dances; Egyptian tomb scenes depicted rain dancers as early as 2700 BC. Rain dances often feature dancing in a circle, the participation of young girls, decoration with green vegetation, nudity, the pouring of water, phallic rites, and whirling, meant to act as a wind charm. Thus, the South African Angoni carry tree branches, and Papuan mythology teaches that grass carried in such dances pierces the eye of the sun, causing it to weep and be covered with clouds.

The Sioux Indians dance four times around a jug of water, through themselves to the ground, and then drink from the jug. The Hopi snake dance, based on the belief that the snakes carry prayers to the rainmakers beneath the earth, doubtless traces back to earlier snake cults in Mexico and Central America. In south eastern European ceremonies, a group of girls proceed from house to house, their leader clothed only in leaves and grass and whirling in their midst while housewives poured water on her.

The community, in which this research is being carried out, depends on agriculture for their survival and water has always played the most important role in their lives. The area is within the catchment area of the Lowveld in the Mpumalanga province and availability of water has not been so much a problem.

The periodic droughts that sweep across the area, particularly below the Bushbuckridge Mountains, sometimes affect the normal



agricultural activities of the communities in those areas. In the early 1980's a severe drought swept across the area and it was so bad that almost all the crops failed including the fruits, which are the main production of the area.

In desperation, the former Lebowa Homeland Head, Dr Phatudi looked all over to try to find water solution in this area. Dr Phatudi, under desperation, consulted the Japanese company, which was in the process of advertising a new machine for making rain through vapour. This old man happened to have visited Japan and was shown this new innovation. The machine was brought in to the Bushbuckridge area and when it failed to produce the expected water people became very angry. In that situation, the African people look to the ancestors for help.

In the mountainous area of the Northern Province, now called Limpopo along the Drakensberg Mountains, lies a village of the Balovedu tribe, led by the dynasty of the Modjadji's. The chieftainship of this dynasty is led by women and can be traced from the revered Rain Queen. The latest representative of a 400-year-old matriarchal dynasty believed to have magical rainmaking powers, and South Africa's only reigning queen.

Rain Queen, Modjadji V serves as the secular and religious leader of her people, although her brother handles most administrative details because of the seclusion her position traditionally requires. Modjadji V was initiated into the dynasty's rainmaking secrets after her mother, Queen Modjadji IV, succeeded to the crown on the

22<sup>nd</sup> October 1959, and she gained the throne upon the latter's death in 1982 (Schlosser 2002:9).

In recent years she was seldom called on to make rain. Modjadji V, like her predecessors, was respected and consulted by tribes throughout the region as well as by national leaders, including former president Nelson Mandela. Her great-grandmother, Queen Modjadji II, was the inspiration for H. Rider Haggard's 1887 novel.



#### **4.11 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION:**

The African continent is without doubt the continent most affected by poverty and underdevelopment. Despite churches efforts at eradicating poverty, Stiglitz notes that the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty increased from 41.6 percent in 1981 to 46.9 percent in 2001 (2006: 11). Given Africa's increasing population, this means that the number of people living in extreme poverty has almost doubled from 164 million to 316 million. He attributes this to the fact that Africa is the region most exploited by globalization, which keeps it to be poor.

Extreme poverty means that households cannot meet basic needs for survival. They are chronically hungry, unable to access healthcare, lack the amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation, cannot afford education for some or all of the children and perhaps lack rudimentary shelter, a roof to keep the rain out of the hut, a chimney to remove the smoke from the cook stove, and basic articles of clothing such as shoes. Unlike moderate and relative poverty, extreme poverty only occurs in developing countries.