RESEARCHING AFRICA
FROM INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS TO STRUCTURED PROGRAMMES

The role of the Nordic Africa Institute

A Report to the NAI 50th Anniversary by

MICHAEL STÅHL
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PUBLISHER’S PREFACE

The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) is proud to be celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The institute was established on 4 September 1962 at a time when important changes were taking place in Africa. Many countries had recently achieved independence, heightening interest in aid and development in the Nordic countries and creating a need for greater knowledge of Africa. That same year, the first Swedish government paper on development cooperation (Prop. 1962:100) was presented to parliament and the first Nordic aid agencies were established: NORAD in Norway and DANIDA in Denmark (Finland had initiated its development cooperation already in 1961). The establishment of the institute can be seen as a response to these changes. Since then, the institute has turned over several pages in its history.

When I took up the position of director of the institute at the beginning of 2006, I already had a long history with the institute. My first encounter was in the late 1960s when I, as a student at Uppsala University, was invited to a meeting with the President Leopold Senghor of Senegal. During my years working for SIDA in Zambia and Angola, I remained in touch with NAI. In 1991, I became a member of the NAI Board (until 1996) and then of the Programme and Research Council until 1998.

When I returned to the institute in 2006, one of my first tasks was to finalize the annual report. I wrote:

…it is my very strong belief that the Nordic Africa Institute is in a unique position to become an alternative to mainstream research; because of its genuine partnership with African researchers; because of its emphasis on mutual learning processes and problem definition and because of its focus on local level complexities. Our challenge is to make this research available not only to academia but just as much to governments, policy-makers and those responsible for the courses of action taken by international institutions.
In making this statement I was following in a tradition that started with the previous heads of NAI, namely Prof. Carl Gösta Widstrand (director 1962-84), Dr Michael Ståhl (acting director 1981-83), Prof. Anders Hjort af Ornäs (director 1984-93) and Prof. Lennart Wohlgemuth (director 1993-2005). All of my predecessors made their mark on the institute, but throughout the institute’s key characteristic remained its focus on the mutual process of learning. The institute’s mandate has changed over the years, and more and more emphasis is placed on research and research collaboration. It is the purpose of this book to show how this mutual learning process started.

Today, the institute has four distinct research clusters, a dynamic publishing unit and a library renowned for its service and collections. It is my hope that when we move into our new premises in September 2012, ‘the Africa House in the Botanical Garden’, the institute will not only be able to provide a better working environment but will also be better equipped to serve our increasing audience within as well as beyond academia.

Carin Norberg
Director
AUTHOR’S PREFACE

The Nordic Africa Institute enters its second half century as a mature research organisation with a plethora of research projects and programmes completed or under way, along with various policy-related activities and a unique repository of records on Africa. As NAI looks forward and plans the research agenda for the coming decade there is a need to take stock of past achievements.

My task has not been to evaluate, but to contextualise, review and reflect on five research programmes that were undertaken at NAI from the late 1980s and into the 1990s. With these structured, thematic, collaborative programmes, NAI sought to complement its efforts in support of predominantly individual academic projects.

For each of the selected programmes, I set out a short summary of the developmental context, followed by accounts of the purpose and theoretical approach of the programme, its implementation and outputs. I then describe the main research findings. This description is general and selective, as the studies arising from each programme are nuanced and defy ready summarisation. In cases where programmes were externally evaluated, a summary of the evaluation is given, followed by a selection of book reviews. Lastly, the impact of the programmes is discussed.

I have consulted the respective programme coordinators in the course of my work. However, any error is of course my responsibility.

In order to put the five programmes in a larger context, I give a brief account of the research support provided by NAI in its initial years and I conclude with an overview of the research profile and administration of NAI up to the present day.

It is my hope that this publication will enhance wider understanding of and appreciation for NAI’s role as a research organisation.

Michael Ståhl
Uppsala, May, 2012
Building Research Capacity at NAI

CHAPTER 1

From individual projects to consolidated programmes

The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI)1 started its operations on a modest scale in 1962. Three travel grants were awarded to young Nordic scholars with an interest in Africa. The institute arranged a few public lectures and published booklets with general information about the continent. Fifty years later the activities of the institute have developed and expanded to become an internationally renowned centre where research, documentation, publishing and networking support each other and provide opportunities for advanced research by Nordic and African academics. Over the years NAI has awarded 2500 travel and study grants, held around 300 meetings ranging from seminars and workshops to large conferences. Seven hundred booklets, research reports, anthologies and monographs have been published by the institute while its research staff also has increasingly contributed articles and book chapters to publications produced by other publishers.

This chapter summarises the early development of a research strategy at NAI.

The Institute was set up in 1962 as a documentation and information centre to support research into all aspects of development in

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1 Until 1988, the official name was Scandinavian Institute of African Studies (SIAS).
Africa, facilitate cooperation between Nordic researchers and to link them to researchers based in Africa. This was the era of decolonisation and interest in Africa grew among the wider public. The Nordic countries became proactively engaged as aid donors and as supporters of anti-apartheid movements. It was considered timely that a centre of knowledge on Africa be created.

The institute’s library became the main repository of official documents and research-based information on Africa. Building up the library and awarding small grants were the main activities in the early years. Young researchers in Nordic countries could apply for travel grants for short research trips to Africa or for study grants to enable them to spend a month in the institute’s library. Travel grants for journalists were also awarded.

Although jointly financed by the Nordic countries the institute is a Swedish public authority under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The overall responsibility for the management of the institute rests with the director and the Board, consisting of representatives of the governments of the Nordic countries and of various research communities. The responsibilities of the Board were amended in 1989. In 1996/97 it was replaced by a Programme and Research Council.

Over time, the mandate of the institute was expanded to include research conducted by institute staff. The first full-time researcher was recruited by NAI in 1969. In 1981, the mandate was formally amended to include the carrying out of research by NAI. In-house research capacity was augmented by the appointment of research fellows to time-limited positions (3-6 years). One researcher from each Nordic country was recruited to carry out his/her own research on a half-time basis. The balance of the researcher’s time was spent in supporting NAI’s operations.

NAI’s publication programme initially included information booklets, but research-based publications (anthologies, monographs, research reports) gradually came to predominate. Policy-oriented information was also published. NAI has over the years arranged international conferences annually or on an ad hoc basis. These have been
attended by Nordic, African and international experts in the relevant fields. Conference proceedings and other edited volumes have been published.

In addition, in 1982, a guest researchers’ programme was initiated. African scholars could spend a few months at the institute writing up findings from their own projects. The guest researchers gave seminars and forged contacts with Nordic scholars through visits to universities in the Nordic region.

Thus, research gradually began to play an increasingly important role at the institute. However, research initiatives were conducted on an individual basis and the research profile of the institute shifted over time in line with the individual projects.

Researchers attached to NAI have an academic background and are recruited from universities. However, their research work at NAI is not necessarily limited to the pursuit of academic excellence. Rather, researchers may produce research-based knowledge for use by others, such as fellow researchers, aid administrators, journalists and the interested public. For researchers recruited to lead large programmes, special conditions apply (see chapter 2).

Researchers are drawn mainly from the social sciences, but also from the humanities, and the research emphasis has largely, but not exclusively, been on development and aid. However, environmental studies came on to the agenda as early as the 1980s, with political ecology a key element. In later years, research at NAI included cultural studies, human security and conflict management studies.

While the mandate of NAI includes research, as well as information and documentation, related to the whole African continent, the bulk of the institute’s research programmes and projects focus on countries and regions in sub-Saharan Africa.

Of the staff establishment at NAI, researchers have comprised one third (moving towards half and half in the last few years) of all employees, the others being involved in documentation, information, publishing and administration. The total staff establishment has ranged from 30 to 45 persons.
In the mid-1980s, NAI developed a research strategy that emphasised comprehensive research into frontline issues involving several researchers from different disciplines. The strategic aim was to refocus the institute’s research-support capacity from backing-up external research conducted on individual basis to driving new and forward-looking research topics. This was to be achieved by establishing a nucleus of scholarly competence at the institute in select research areas of importance to African countries as well as to Nordic development cooperation. NAI could thereby draw on and coordinate the substantial, but dispersed, scholarly activities at universities and research institutes in Nordic countries.

As a result, a number of coherent research programmes were initiated. In this review, five of these research programmes have been selected for presentation: Human Life in Arid Lands (1987-93), Urban Development in Rural Context (1989-95), Political and Social Context of Structural Adjustment (1990-2001), Poverty and Prosperity (1994-99) and Cultural Images in and of Africa (1995-2010).

However, the research activities at NAI during this period were not limited to these programmes. During the 1990s and the first decade of this century, several other research programmes and projects were conducted. They are briefly discussed in chapter 9.
CHAPTER 2:

Organisation of the research programmes

The institute’s research strategy formulated in the mid-1980s gave emphasis to comprehensive research programmes that included several researchers from different disciplines. In accordance with this strategy, NAI planned to conduct four comprehensive research programmes during the following decade. The first such research programme was *Human Life in Arid Lands*. It served as a test model with regard to approach, management and administration. The lessons learned from this programme were incorporated into ensuing ones.

The timeframe for each was set at six years: an initial period of three years followed by a second three-year period on condition that first-stage outputs were satisfactory. The Board appointed an internal committee to oversee the development of proposals for research programmes. After the Board had approved a proposal, a coordinator was recruited. The common structure which gradually emerged in the 1990s can be summarised as follows.

- The Board of NAI identifies a thematic topic of continental relevance, but including national and local case studies. A study is commissioned to elaborate the proposed research.
- A broad framework for the research is sketched. The topic is multidisciplinary. Emphasis is placed on local impacts of continental problems.
- The timeframe is set at three years, with the possibility of extension.
- A budget from NAI core funds is approved.
- An externally recruited programme coordinator is employed.
- NAI administrative staff time is allocated to the programme.
- Additional funding is sought from external donors.
- The coordinator elaborates the content and mode of implementation.
- An inventory of ongoing Nordic research in the field is compiled and a network of Nordic researchers is built up.
An African research network is developed along the same lines.

The programmes commenced with an introductory workshop involving Nordic and African scholars, following which programme content was further elaborated and broken down. Fieldwork was then conducted to gather empirical material and to refine the programme problematique. Seminars and workshops were held as the programme proceeded, with select papers being published as research reports. A final wrap-up conference was held and was followed by an anthology summarising research results. The latter was published either by NAI or other publishers. It was intended that, after programmes were wound-up at NAI, they would continue in some form at other Nordic and African research institutions.

The first comprehensive research programme was *Human Life in Arid Lands*. It was launched against the backdrop of recurring drought in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel in the 1970s and 1980s. Eight specific research projects addressed environmental, cultural, socioeconomic and development planning issues. The programme drew on deep in-house scientific capacity at NAI and also benefited from the forging of a Nordic-African researcher network.

The second programme was *Urban Development in Rural Context*. Its subject was the rapid and rather unstructured urbanisation in Africa in the 1980s that led to metropolitan sprawl and the proliferation of small towns. The programme focused on the interface between small towns and their rural hinterlands.

The third programme was *Political and Social Context of Structural Adjustment*. This was in response to major policy changes in almost all African countries recommended by, and sometimes imposed by, the international donor community. The programme sought to assess the impact of adjustment-based policy reforms on sector performance and the consequences for different sections of the population.

The fourth programme was *Poverty and Prosperity*. Its point of departure was the preoccupation in international aid organisations with defining and measuring poverty in Africa without consulting “the
poor.” The programme looked beyond simplistic, unidimensional definitions of poverty and probed the images and concepts of poverty underpinning donor definitions and contrasted them with how “poor” people label themselves. It set out to reveal biases and investigate the ways in which African societies conceptualise and respond to poverty. In particular, the programme investigated the self-images of those women, men and young people outsiders define as poor.

The fifth programme was *Cultural Images in and of Africa*. It aimed to encourage both the study of cultural images of Africa (how the West views and interprets culture in Africa as particular and different) as well as cultural images in Africa (contemporary cultural expressions by African artists and writers).

In terms of outputs, these research programmes dealt with in this publication were highly productive. A total of 90 books (many of them anthologies) and research reports were published, involving some 400 contributors. Fifty-five workshops and conferences were held, in which more than 1,000 researchers participated. The programmes also produced information materials and hosted information sessions for professional audiences. Additionally, they led to several major policy seminars aimed at introducing research findings to policymakers in the Nordic countries and, to a lesser degree, in Africa.
Review of five research programmes on African development

The following chapters provide a narrative of five research programmes and set them in the perspective of development issues in Africa. The hopes for rapid development through state-regulated five year plans were high in the early years of independence. But the enthusiasm gradually faded. Throughout the 1980s and during most of the 1990s people in Africa faced difficult times. Economic downturn and political turbulence predominated. Afro-pessimism and donor-fatigue became prevalent among Africa-watchers. The five research programmes reviewed here explored, in their specific niches, the crises in the continent and researched options for a positive development.

CHAPTER 3

Human Life in African Arid Lands (1987-93)

Context

In the 1970s, large parts of Africa suffered from prolonged drought. The arid and semi-arid lowlands of the Horn of Africa were exceptionally hard hit. For the first time, African drought featured in the global mass media.

Drought returned in the 1980s. Media reports claimed that the southern edge of the Sahara was advancing annually and the ques-
tion was raised whether people could continue their traditional way of life in these areas at all.

**Pastoralism** is a mobile form of livestock husbandry practised in dryland Africa where rainfall patterns place restrictions on crop cultivation. Some pastoralist households depend entirely on livestock for subsistence, exchange and social relations. Others have a mixed livelihood, which includes some crop cultivation. All pastoralist groups depend on the movement of herds to different grazing areas during wet and dry seasons.

**Drylands** (semi-arid and arid lands) in Africa extend from the edge of the tropics to the dry desert. They are characterised by a short rainy season and a long dry season.

**Drought:** Relatively wet weather prevailed in the Sahel and Eastern Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Drought struck in the 1970s and returned in the 1980s and early 1990s. International attention on and aid to drylands gave rise to numerous studies on how to reverse environmental degradation. In some countries, governments placed the blame on overgrazing by pastoralists and nomadic herders. Programmes to restrict grazing were mounted based on limited understanding of the livelihoods of the people involved. However, gradually the complexity of the issues associated with land degradation was acknowledged as was the importance of incorporating local needs and knowledge.

The international aid community responded by focusing on providing and distributing food and medicine in order to avert acute distress. A discussion was initiated on how to avoid similar disasters in the future. Programmes for “early warning systems,” “combating desertification,” “diversification of rural economies,” etc. were initiated.
A technocratic approach emphasising engineering and conservation to mitigate degradation was adopted. The understanding of the realities under which local people lived was, however, limited. Herdsmen and farmers inhabiting the regions were considered irrational, as their livelihood patterns contributed to further land degradation. However, technical interventions proved ineffective and it was gradually recognised that the ecological patterns and socioeconomic dynamics in the drylands needed to be better understood.

Environmental issues entered the international development discourse. Several conferences were held where climate and anthropogenic factors and their possible combinations were debated. Examples from the Horn of Africa were often used to highlight the seriousness of environmental degradation. The UN Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm as early as 1972. The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) was established in Nairobi. The UN General Assembly decided in 1974 to initiate concerted action by establishing a Conference on Desertification.

In 1987, the Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future* introduced the concept “sustainable development.” At the same time, preparations commenced for the Rio Summit on the Environment and Development to be held in 1992.

This was the international context of NAI’s decision to initiate the research programme *Human Life in African Arid Lands* (henceforth *Arid Lands*). It was the first comprehensive multidisciplinary and thematic research programme launched in line with the institute’s new research strategy and was intended as a complement to the individual support provided to Nordic researchers. Its relevance to development was indicated by the fact that Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia were among the key recipients of Nordic development aid. Aid agencies discussed how development cooperation could become more relevant to the drought-induced challenges facing these countries. Before this, the semi-arid parts of these countries had received scant attention in development dialogues.

At this point a note on the prehistory of the programme deserves
mention. In 1985, a seminar on problems of soil erosion in Eastern Africa was held in Uppsala with contributions from Nordic researchers. The proceedings were published under the title *Land Management for Survival*. Among the participants were both physical geographers and anthropologists. One theme that attracted attention was the contradiction between household farming and grazing practices on the one hand and deforestation and land degradation on the other. Thus, farming practices secure both food and fodder for the household while simultaneously promoting erosion and diminishing the soil’s water-retention capacity. The seminar concluded that no technical intervention could succeed in the absence of a thorough understanding of the culture and value systems guiding household decision-making. Technical and socioeconomic perspectives are complementary. Planning and policy-making should rest on a broad understanding of the farmer’s and herders’ predicaments and the technical options. These insights had in turn emerged gradually from earlier research projects, not least ‘Studies in Soil Erosion and Sedimentation in Tanzania’ undertaken by the Department of Geography at Stockholm University in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Several of the seminar participants had been involved in that project and later contributed to the *Arid Lands* programme.

**Purpose and theoretical approach**
The NAI Board specified that the programme be interdisciplinary, focus on policy analysis and promote cooperation among researchers and the linking of institutions. The intent was to respond to the African drylands crisis by producing research results that could lead to interventions which would not damage the fragile environment. In addition, the research programme was to bridge the gaps in “grey areas” of research related to drylands. However, the subject matters were left open to give researchers the freedom to explore different aspects of the problem.

By promoting the exchange of research results and perspectives among natural and social scientists, the programme aimed to achieve
a more holistic understanding of the predicament facing dryland communities. The policy objective was the production of science-based information responding to the deteriorating socioeconomic, environmental and security conditions in these regions. To achieve these two major goals, the programme set out to create a Nordic/African network of researchers, policy-makers and NGOs to exchange ideas on dryland issues and explore hitherto neglected research areas.

*Arid Lands* became part of the then academic debate and gave rise to a spate of contributions on the relationships between people, environment and politics. The programme did not attempt to postulate causal relationships, but rather to illuminate patterns of relationship between politics, environment and people’s livelihoods. It illustrated that much emphasis had been placed on the physical degradation of drylands, but little on the problems faced by the pastoralists themselves. Throughout, the programme showed that concepts and models for sustainability must be premised on the predicament of the people living there, including problems of insecurity and marginalisation.

*Arid Lands* explored a critical security paradigm by examining the extent to which environmental degradation, particularly desertification, generates conflict among different resource users (pastoralists and farmers as well as large- and small-scale farmers). Such conflicts pose problems for human welfare, livelihood, security and political stability by creating environmental refugees, famines and mass population displacements. These factors are often linked to economic mismanagement, inadequate governance, oppressive regimes and inequitable distribution of the factors of development (health, education, water, food security, pro-poor policies, etc.). These debates were at the centre of the research programme. They eventuated in nuanced perspectives on the interface between human and environmental security, which featured in the programme’s final sets of workshops, seminars and publications.
Implementation

NAI was home to a solid research competence on pastoral communities in eastern Africa. Prof. Anders Hjort af Ornäs (Sweden), then director, was a leading researcher on pastoralist communities and was at the helm of the programme in its first phase, 1987-90. Dr M.A. Mohamed Salih (Sudan) was programme leader during the concluding phase, 1990-93. He had been involved in the programme from the start and Anders Hjort continued to contribute to it.

In addition to core funding from NAI, the programme received external funding from Nordic development cooperation agencies. It was implemented through fieldwork, seminars and workshops and the results were presented at conferences. Through the NAI guest researcher programme, African scholars dealing with drylands were invited to Uppsala.

A forerunner at Stockholm University was the “Somali Camel Research Project: Survival in Arid Lands.” It had been financed by the Somali Academy of Sciences and Art and SAREC and was incorporated as a sub-project of Arid Lands. From 1983 to 1987 there were a number of PhD projects conducted by Somali researchers at Swedish and British universities and 20 working papers in the Camel Forum series were issued. The activities of the Somali Camel Research Project came to an end in 1991 when civil war made further research impossible. The field station in Baidoa was destroyed and the researchers fled to Ethiopia and Kenya.

During the second phase, the programme focused on (i) a historical perspective on resource management strategies to survive food shortages, (ii) the dynamics of survival strategies and (iii) the role of the state, development cooperation agencies and private investment. The key question was “what forces man to ruin the basis of his subsistence, and what room is available for manoeuvre?” Security issues in the drylands were also highlighted. The increasing lawlessness and proliferation of small arms throughout the Horn spurred researchers to explore what social science analysis could contribute to conflict resolution.
Outputs
During the course of the programme, 15 seminars, workshops and conferences were held. The workshops and conferences resulted in published conference proceedings, which were collections of articles by individual authors (10 to 15 authors per book). The volumes included in-depth studies from specific localities as well as macro studies. Fourteen publications came directly out of the programme, along with several spin-off publications. The proceedings appeared in less than a year of the meetings at which the papers were originally given. Two books sold out quickly, as did a second edition of the major publication, *Ecology and Politics*. NAI also published a working paper series related to African arid lands. Nine such papers, by NAI staff or guest researchers, were published between 1992 and 1994.

Some 100 researchers were involved in the programme, of whom 75 per cent came from African countries, with the balance from Nordic countries.

The programme was very positively evaluated in 1996.

The outputs are detailed in the appendix at the end of the chapter.

Main research findings
The research showed that socioeconomic problems were much more difficult to understand and address than technical problems. It aimed at understanding local coping mechanisms (including their shortcomings) and at analysing emerging adaptive strategies. What also emerged was the diversity of dryland production systems and the variety of livestock species kept, with different reproductive rates, mobility and market values. Herder households were shown never to live exclusively off their animals, but to engage in varying degrees of market exchange for agricultural and other products. The research also highlighted the area requirements of pastoralism: cattle, goats and camels require a wide spatial range with different grazing and browsing capacities. This is especially true in years of rainfall failure. *Arid Lands* also elaborated on the concept of human adaptation to a changing environment (crucial in the context of periodic droughts). Adaptation is
not necessarily at the level of a community striving to achieve balance. Rather, internal differentiations arise within communities between households with differing access to assets. Hence conflicts between individuals can give impetus to the dynamics of adaptation.

The programme also gave attention to political factors. Throughout the countries concerned, government policies have favoured farming to the detriment of traditional pastoralism. The research showed the livelihood of pastoralist groups can be threatened when political decisions are made that prohibit access to strategic grazing areas. Such policies may relate to irrigated agriculture, the establishment of national parks, infrastructure projects and border closures. Moreover, the studies showed that political conflicts could lead to ecological stress, as when a pastoralist community is forced to flee armed groups and seek refuge in areas of very fragile vegetation. Ecological stress factors such as drought can also give rise to “environmental refugees,” who enter territory already claimed by other groups.

**Evaluation**

*Arid Lands* was evaluated in 1996 by Prof. Sofus Christiansen of the University of Copenhagen. His report concluded that the programme was important for the spread of innovative research ideas to the research community dealing with drylands. His main observations were the following.

The programme was considered highly innovative in its promotion of interdisciplinary analysis. In the 1980s, the trend was to view problems in the semi-arid lands as stemming from overpopulation and overexploitation of natural resources, compounded by temporary rainfall shortages. By contrast, many publications emanating from *Arid Lands* introduced new angles and provided a holistic view. They highlighted the variability of pastoralists’ adaptive strategies in different ecological zones and socioeconomic contexts. The holistic approach was due to the broad range of researchers involved, including veterinarians, botanists, geographers, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. The publications drew attention to the
behaviour of the local people deriving their livelihood from animal husbandry in the stricken areas, the rationale for their decisions and their coping strategies.

The evaluator held that the academic **quality** of the articles forming the bulk of the publications was generally good and sometimes excellent. He found that the papers/articles/books served to launch and discuss new ideas and feed them into research networks. The purpose was not to deliver fully fledged academic contributions for the advancement of science. Rather, in the evaluator’s words:

“the programme activities have provided and stimulated a totally new view of the African arid lands. The subtleties of nomadism have been illustrated, the fragile balance and synergies between the herders and steadfast farmers have been demonstrated, and the close links between utilization of natural resources as well as local knowledge and political influence have been shown.”

The approach characterising *Arid Lands* had obvious bearings on development. It provided valuable knowledge of dryland conditions that could be considered by policy-makers and aid agencies. Moreover, it elicited interdisciplinary cooperation between research groups in the Nordic countries and in Eastern Africa.

As for outreach the programme brought together researchers, field practitioners and policy-makers with local communities. In this way, awareness of the need for integrated analysis was created among Nordic and African researchers and among African professionals who would later be influential in policy-making. The *Arid Lands* programme was efficient in building networks and communication among Nordic researchers who, as a result, came to hold a conspicuous position in dryland research in the international research community. The programme was also commended for disseminating research results to national government authorities mandated to support arid lands development and to aid agencies.
Impact
In the academic field, *Arid Lands* had several offshoots. Researchers in the programme were instrumental in setting up new research projects and postgraduate training programmes related to the theme.

In 1992, the “Pastoral Information Network Programme” was developed by NAI, the University of Nairobi and the University of Uppsala. It coordinated a number of research activities in the Horn of Africa with a view to improving understanding of pastoral communities’ coping mechanisms. It was supplemented by an MSc programme in Range Management at the University of Nairobi. A PhD programme in Dryland Resource Management was later added to it, open to students from countries in Eastern Africa.

NAI initiated a follow-up research project, “Nomads of the Drought in Sahel – Survival Strategies,” led by Dr Mette Bovin (Denmark), who had contributed to *Arid Lands*. This was conducted from 1993 to 1998. A concluding conference, “Crisis and Culture in Africa – with special Emphasis on Pastoral Nomads and Farmers in the West African Sahel,” was held in 1998. The scope of analysis was broad and highlighted the importance of culture in human survival strategies. Several papers were edited for publication.

*Arid Lands* had an impact at a policy level as well. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is an institution for cooperation among countries in Eastern Africa with vast drylands. Headquartered in Djibouti, it runs programmes related to drought mitigation, food security, etc. Through *Arid Lands*, NAI became involved in the planning of a Rangeland Management/Dryland Husbandry Programme in the region that became part of IGAD’s long-term plan in the 1990s. Researchers involved in the NAI programme served as consultants to IGAD.

The country studies (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda) prepared by Anders Hjort af Ornäs and Mohamed Salih for SIDA/SAREC under the auspices of *Arid Lands* formed the basis of the development of the IGAD Drylands Husbandry Programme. IGAD entrusted the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern
and Southern Africa (OSSREA) with the task of implementing the programme. The demand for the programme’s services was so great that it was twice extended: the first phase ran from 1995 to 1998, the second from 1999 to 2001 and the third, consolidation period from January 2002 to June 2003. Programme activities were triangulated, involving researchers, policy-makers from the ministries of agriculture and animal husbandry and pastoralists. Between them, they implemented community-based water harvesting, training of pastoralists as paraveterinarians, as well as action-research processes that considered potential cooperation among private and public, formal and informal sectors and institutions. In a sense, the Dryland Husbandry Programme created a strong research-policy nexus and outlived *Arid Lands* by several years.

On the ground the picture is different. The civil war in Somalia has precluded development efforts since the mid-1990s. In the Ethiopian region of Ogaden, insecurity and the military clashes between rebel groups and the Ethiopian armed forces has had a similar effect.

By contrast, in the drylands of Kenya range management has improved in several places, not least due to the programmes supported by the Kenya government and by NGOs. Government dryland programmes are coordinated by the Ministry of Arid and Semi-Aid Lands. The Pastoral Information Network Programme launched a number of training activities in which many officials from the ministry participated.

Notwithstanding these initiatives, pastoralists remain under threat as a result of large-scale commercial farming and increased difficulty in accessing adequate grazing.
APPENDIX

Workshops and conferences

- Camel Pastoralism as a Food System (workshop held in Addis Ababa, 1988)
- Environmental Stress and Security (workshop held in Stockholm, 1988)
- Camel Pastoralism as a Food System (workshop held in Khartoum, 1988)
- The Case of African Drylands and Balanced Camel Production (workshop held in Uppsala, 1989)
- Camel Pastoralism as a Food System in Ethiopia (workshop held in Nazareth, 1989)
- Adaptive Strategies in African Arid Lands (workshop held in Uppsala, 1989)
- Symbols and Resource Management (workshop held in Helsinki, 1989)
- Pastoralism and the State in African Arid Lands (workshop held in Gothenburg, 1990)
- Man and Camel in Africa (workshop held in Agadir, 1990)
- Development Policies and Environmental Crisis (seminar held in Uppsala and Stockholm, 1990)
- Security in African Drylands (workshop held in Uppsala, 1990)
- Environmental Crisis and Development in Africa (closing conference for the first phase of the programme held in Uppsala, 1990)
- The Impact of the Dryland Crisis in African River Basins (seminar held in Nazareth, 1991)
- Pasture and Feeding Systems for Sustainable Development and Environment (seminar held in Kampala, 1992)
- The Role of Social Science in Conflict Resolution (seminar held in Helsinki, 1993)
Publications
(arranged chronologically):
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Hjort af Ornäs, A. (ed.) Camels in Development (NAI, 1988)
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CHAPTER 4

Urban Development in Rural Context in Africa (1989–95)

Context

In the 1970s, Africa was the least urbanised continent. However, by the early 1980s the African urban growth rate was the highest in the world. Population dynamics, together with rural stagnation, meant that poor people migrated in great numbers to the urban areas in pursuit of a better living. Metropolitan areas around national capitals grew in uncontrolled ways while smaller towns also expanded. Urban growth was part of the broader socioeconomic changes on the continent. The rapid economic growth in the 1960s came to an end in the 1970s as a result of the global shock generated by oil price hikes. Terms of trade for African goods declined and caused economic and social hardship. Simultaneously, some regions experienced prolonged drought. This was the backdrop against which migration and urban growth took place within Africans countries.

Urbanisation in Africa, including its causes and impacts, had received scant attention from international organisations. Planners, policy-makers and researchers, including Nordic development cooperation agencies, were focused on rural development. Possible connections between town and country were not emphasised.

A shift in development perspective gradually occurred. As urban slums sprawled, so urban poverty became an issue. It became apparent that urban growth would continue at an increasing pace over coming decades in Africa and in other developing regions. The establishment in 1979 of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (HABITAT), with its headquarters in Nairobi, heralded greater international interest in urban issues.

However, many of the emerging urban studies disregarded the rural context and the rural-urban dynamic. Studies typically focused on metropolitan areas, in particular housing and social problems in the slums.

As part of its new research strategy, NAI considered a possible research initiative whereby urban development would be studied in
its rural context. The Board agreed to go forward with a proposal to launch a research programme focusing on rural-urban linkages, on the grounds that the proposal held out the promise of generating new insights for policy-makers and development cooperation agencies. Such studies, it was argued, would shed light not only on the emerging urban sector in Africa but also on how urban development could contribute to overcoming rural problems.

**Purpose and theoretical approach**

In 1988, NAI took the final decision to launch a research programme entitled *Urban Development in Rural Context in Africa* (henceforth *Small Towns*). The programme started with a survey of ongoing research, which revealed widely differing perspectives. The “growth pole” approach postulated that small urban centres could have a positive dynamic impact on their rural hinterlands, that is, that economic growth in the rural areas could be “injected” from the national capital through small towns. Other schools (“core-periphery” and “dependency”) held different views: small towns were seen as exploitative of the surrounding farming communities. Infrastructural projects would only open up the countryside to more exploitation and contribute to its further marginalisation. Yet other studies took an intermediate position: small towns could positively influence rural development if government policies were designed to promote mutually beneficial rural-urban links.

The point of departure for *Small Towns* was a basically positive attitude to the potential of small towns in a rural development context. The purpose of the research programme was stated as: “a fresh attempt to address the issue of how small towns can, and do, play a significant and positive role in promoting rural development.” A central feature of this research was that the growth of small urban centres is a necessary condition and prerequisite for rural transformation. The research set out to explore the small town as a niche in the urban-rural settlement continuum.

Initially, eight core research projects were defined. They centred
on, *inter alia*, the functions of small towns (economic/administrative/political) in relation to surrounding rural areas; how people combine involvement in urban and rural activities; and the pattern of migration from rural areas to small towns or large cities. A particular interest was how small towns could absorb rural migration on a sustainable basis in order to divert migration away from large cities. Since the whole research field was rudimentary, the programme included development of a database on urban research in a rural context.

**A small town**

A common-sense definition is that a small town has a higher population density than its rural hinterland and a majority of its inhabitants are engaged in commerce, manufacturing, services and administration rather than agriculture. However, there is no worldwide consensus on the criteria for defining urban, let alone small town. A combination of criteria is used to define an urban centre: statistical (that is, minimum population threshold); number of administrative functions; and range of economic activity. For example, in Ethiopia, the definition of an urban area can have three meanings according to three different criteria: population size; an administrative definition that must meet four sub-criteria; and an economic definition, which considers five sub-criteria. Consequently, the definition is both complicated and potentially confusing. According to the latest population census of Ethiopia (2007), the smallest urban centre had only 553 people!

The programme did not attempt a formal, universal definition of “small town.” However, a working definition for the African context was developed, namely “a node of economic and social opportunity.”
Implementation
An externally recruited programme coordinator, Dr Jonathan Baker (Norway), took up his position in 1989. Programme funding came from NAI’s regular budget. Funds for conferences and special studies were secured from Nordic development cooperation agencies. The programme coordinator was the only full-time employee, while NAI’s staff provided administrative support. The programme was to run from 1989 to 1995. At the end of the first three year period, the board decided that progress to date warranted a further three years.

Small Towns evolved by creating a Nordic-African network of researchers interested in the interface between the urban and the rural. Researchers were invited to conferences and to present papers, most of which were later edited and published in NAI volumes. The programme coordinator conducted research and published the results in reports and articles. In all, close to 60 researchers took part in the programme, almost half of whom were based in African countries.

Outputs
During the life of the programme, four conferences were held, giving rise to four anthologies edited by the programme coordinator. The programme had several spin-off effects in terms of new research programmes (see the Impact section below).

The outputs are detailed in the appendix at the end of the chapter.

Main research findings
The programme’s first publication (1990) included 15 articles grouped around the themes of (i) networks, enterprises and entrepreneurship, (ii) urban-rural linkages, opportunities and survival strategies, (iii) planning for small urban centres, and (iv) constraints imposed by state policies. The second publication (1992) focused on how specific sectors, organisations and processes function in the development of small towns. The topics covered in these volumes overlapped.

A later volume (1997) dealt with urbanisation in francophone Africa. It covered much the same ground as the first two volumes.
but focused in particular on spatial planning, local enterprises, urban housing, the urban poor, architectural change and gender. The overall approach remained the same and the findings supported the earlier ones. The book on migration experience in Africa (1995), dealt with (i) conceptual and methodological issues related to migration, (ii) continental and regional overviews, (iii) case studies of a wide range of migration experiences, and (iv) gender issues in migration from a substantive and methodological perspective.

The main findings are outlined below. The articles on urban-rural linkages revealed that a large proportion of urban dwellers maintain links with the rural hinterland, usually with their community of origin. Townspeople had agricultural plots and domestic animals outside the town. Dual households were common, with those household members residing in town surviving on various jobs while other members remained on the farmstead and came to town to sell produce and maintain family contacts. Thus farming and herding on village lands was combined with wage labour and entrepreneurship in the town. This pattern was initially thought of in terms of a male-headed household in town and a female-headed household in the rural areas. However, further research revealed greater complexity (see below). The tendency to retain a foothold on the farm arose not only from cultural attachment to the village and ancestral land but also because it made economic sense. By splitting households, costs were reduced, sources of income diversified, access to services enhanced and greater security was achieved in times of crisis.

Several articles analysed the background of rural migrants to towns. Contrary to the common opinion, it was found that very poor households did not migrate. Moving requires both resources and planning. It was among the relatively better-off villagers that successful migrants to towns were found. They could pay for the initial costs of accommodation and of setting up a business in an urban environment. However, such migrants did not cut ties with their village homes, but kept their plots of land, which were cultivated by remaining family members or paid labourers. They also returned
home at intervals to maintain social contacts. This was considered a reasonable insurance in the event their urban careers failed.

The gender-disaggregated studies provided new insights into the then little known phenomenon of female urban migration. Conventionally, it was thought that women stayed behind in the countryside or were co-migrants accompanying their husbands, but the studies in the programme revealed a pattern of independent female migration. Women made their way into towns as small traders, entrepreneurs and wage labourers. In some cases, women “expelled” from their rural homes (through marital conflicts, or by being widowed without possessions, etc.) made a fresh start in town as hawkers and dressmakers, activities that made it possible for them to acquire a new home. Their success was also related to their ability to tie into urban networks (churches, neighbours, workmates) to make up for the loss of their earlier networks. The studies of female migration patterns later developed into a follow-up NAI research programme (see Impact below).

The studies of government policies regarding small towns revealed an overwhelmingly negative picture in relation to the initial assumption that small towns could play a significant and positive role for rural areas. Governments were found to prioritise extractive urban functions such as taxes, price controls, low-quality public services and restrictions on popular participation in decision-making. On the whole, government’s role was found to be detrimental to small town development.

The chapters on entrepreneurship and on town planning corroborated the findings on state intervention. They showed that local enterprises could only find market niches that were too small to be of interest to capital city-based parastatals. However, local entrepreneurs typically were short of capital, contacts and relevant education. Official attitudes to small-scale enterprise were not actively supportive. At the time the research was undertaken, none of the small towns surveyed had a dynamic, expanding small-enterprise sector, with markets through which products could flow to and from
the surrounding countryside. Case studies from Tanzania and Ethiopia highlighted the small margins of urban entrepreneurship in traditional artisanal sectors such as tailoring, basic commodity retailing, lodging, food and bar services, producing wooden furniture and simple tools, bicycle repair, pottery, beer-brewing and selling, etc. In small towns, the traders and artisans depended on the surrounding rural households, which constituted their market. When farming conditions deteriorated due to drought, for instance, farmers reduced their already meagre spending, with drastic effects for urban businesses. Some studies showed that rural-urban migration was not necessarily one-way. During the first half of the 1990s, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP – see chapter 5) led to public sector cutbacks and reduction in government employees. Since these workers were urban-based, SAPs negatively impacted the urban economy and many former public employees moved back to rural areas where they had family connections. Under these conditions, migration to towns did not appear to be a good option.

The second volume (1992) followed up on several of these issues. The problem it set out was that the peasant countryside in Africa is characterised by very low productivity and a subsistence orientation. The urban sector has ineffective and usually state-controlled industrial enterprises and a state administration stronger in repressive capacity than in service provision.

The researchers identified which structures and institutions could strengthen economic development processes at the interface between small town and countryside. These were (i) access to markets by small businesses on equal terms, (ii) decentralisation of political and economic decision-making to allow for greater influence by local actors, (iii) development of physical, social and institutional infrastructure, and (iv) macro-policies supporting and stimulating local investment and access to services by small urban and rural producers.

The findings from the case studies showed, however, that none of these conditions prevailed in the towns under examination. Rather, markets were controlled by public and private (quasi)monopoly ac-
tors. Governments were unwilling to allow devolution of decision-making to local levels. Access to transport, storage, credit, educational and health facilities was very limited. Macro-policies did not encourage small business. The research findings were thus bleak, holding out little prospect for small towns to play a dynamic role in local development, both urban and rural.

On the other hand, the studies highlighted the multiple activities (up to five different sources of income) characterising households in small urban centres. In this context, their links to rural areas were vital. Members of urban households frequently moved between their urban and rural homes, and were involved in economic activities in both locations. Many town dwellers also resorted to urban farming as a coping strategy.

The role of women migrants to small towns was further pursued in several contributions to Small Towns and earlier findings were corroborated. It was again found that women were moving to towns as independent actors and establishing themselves as labourers or entrepreneurs. In many cases, they succeeded in achieving self-reliance and self-respect.

Reviews
The programme was not externally evaluated, but the book reviews give an idea of how the research was received. In the NAI archives, there are 66 reviews of one or several of the books generated by the programme.

Most of them welcomed the volumes as interesting and important contributions to the understanding of the rural-urban interface in Africa. In particular, they appreciate the varied set of situational reports, and the detailed discussions of microeconomic modifications triggered by changes in African macroeconomic policies. The articles were commended for their broad coverage, from national urban systems and broad issues of government policy to inquiries into life stories of individuals. The content was considered informative, providing welcome first-hand empirical data badly needed in this under-researched
field. The chapters on gender, showing women as independent migrants and not only dependents of migrating men, were considered to be the most original. One of the books emerging from the programme, *The Migration Experience in Africa* (1995), was selected by *Choice*, published by the Association of College and Research Libraries (a division of the American Library Association) as an Outstanding Academic Book for 1996. Only four reviews were entirely negative, concluding that the shortcomings outweighed the strengths and that the authors provided little meaningful conceptual framework on the specificity of small towns or the nature of rural-urban division in Africa.

Some of the positive reviews noted, however, the limitations of the publications. Since they were anthologies based on conferences, the volumes sometimes lacked clear internal cohesion. The contributions differed substantially in lines of approach, topic and context and were uneven, with some of them weak, others good and yet others profound. Several reviews pointed to the absence of clear definition of “small town,” “rural-urban interface” and other central concepts. However, such shortcomings were generally seen as being made up for by the highly interesting research findings in the various articles.

One review claimed that a note of sadness pervades the collection. The research findings indicate that socioeconomic conditions in town and country alike had deteriorated in the 1980s to the extent that urban life for most had become a matter of survival rather than development.

The original hypothesis in the research programme, that small towns could play a positive role in rural development, was thus not verified. As one reviewer noted of the final volume, “we are no closer to a clear-cut conclusion on the positive role in rural development to be played by small towns than we were when the first volume appeared.”
Impact

The Small Towns programme had a close working relationship with the Human Settlements Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London. The programme contributed several papers to the IIED journal Environment and Development. Long after the formal conclusion of the programme, its outputs continued to be referred to in various publications on urban issues, for example C. Tacoli, (ed.) Rural-Urban Linkages (Earthscan, 2006) and the World Bank report Ethiopia – Diversifying the Rural Economy: An Assessment of the Investment Climate for Small and Informal Enterprises (WB, 49564-ET, 2009).

There were several off-shoots of Small Towns in the academic field, including two new research projects. These were The Gender Research on Urbanisation, Planning, Housing and Everyday Life (GRUPHEL) and Cities, Governance and Civil Society in Africa. They are described in chapter 9.
APPENDIX

Conferences

- Small Town Africa: Studies in Rural-Urban Interaction (conference held in Uppsala, 1989)
- Small Towns and Rural Development under Conditions of Stress – Adaptive Strategies and Survival Mechanisms (conference held in Copenhagen, 1990)
- The Dynamics of Internal Non-Metropolitan Migration and Linkage in Africa (conference held in Kristiansand, 1991)
- Interactions ville-campagne en Afrique Noire: l’expérience francophone (conference held in Ouagadougou, 1993)

Publications

(arranged chronologically):

Baker, J. *Rural Towns Study in Ethiopia* (SIDA, 1994)
CHAPTER 5

The Political and Social Context of Structural Adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa (1990-2001)

Context

In the 1980s, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa experienced economic decline and political instability. In the wake of oil price shocks and debt crises in the early 1980s, African economies faltered and growth diminished. Per capita incomes shrank, income from exports decreased, infrastructure fell into disarray and governments were shaky. The international donor community, the source of the bulk of development budgets in African countries, lost confidence in the systems of state intervention across all societal sectors that had been growing since independence. The World Bank and IMF, supported by bilateral donors, began to demand structural reforms as a precondition for further funding. They became known as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). Essentially, the adjustment and stabilisation packages proposed by donors and implemented (in varying degree) by national governments initially focused on deregulation, that is, less state intervention and more market-based arrangements in agriculture, trade, finance and physical and social infrastructure. Political conditions were later added, notably “good governance,” when it became evident that several African governments were paying lip service to the reforms but were reluctant to execute them.

The implementation of structural adjustment was monitored by academics and political activists. A large body of statistics, pamphlets and research reports were presented at conferences and were vehemently discussed. The SAPs were without doubt controversial. Their proponents argued that African national economies were stifled by excessive state intervention and that market solutions would unleash growth driven by the private sector. Critics argued that SAPs led to deindustrialisation and the dismantling of vital public services (health, education, agricultural extension, etc.), thus exacerbating poverty. As poverty alleviation was a major goal of Nordic bilateral
development cooperation, a central question was to what extent Nordic aid agencies should support SAPs.

In 1989, the NAI Board decided to initiate a multidisciplinary research programme on aspects of the stabilisation and adjustment policies promoted by international financial institutions and implemented by many African countries. It was deemed important, particularly in the context of Nordic bilateral development cooperation, that NAI be part of the international academic and political debate generated by adjustment. The Board laid out the broad outlines of the programme, but left the decisions on detailed content to the programme coordinator.

**Purpose and theoretical approach**

The central research focus of *The Political and Social Context of Structural Adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa* (henceforth *Structural Adjustment*) was the political context of both the World Bank/IMF packages and the policies independently adopted by African governments. The programme also focused on the impact of these policies on domestic social groups.

The major consideration when adopting this thematic topic was that the preconditions for development in African countries had changed drastically over the past several years as a result of debt crisis and general economic decline. The impact of the new macroeconomic conditions was not fully understood. Research coordinated by NAI could help shape Nordic guidelines on World Bank and IMF conditionalities.

The programme was not intended to investigate structural adjustment’s macroeconomic impacts, which the NAI Board considered an already crowded field. Rather, the main focus was to be on related political and socioeconomic processes and impacts.

At the outset, the programme aimed to link micro-level case studies, sectoral studies and broader issues of social and political change brought about through structural adjustment. The research areas included agriculture, the informal sector, labour relations, social and
physical infrastructure, as well as national-level politics of adjustment. The focus was mainly on the national and local impacts of adjustment and the economic and social structures emerging from liberalisation “on the ground.”

Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe were initially selected for study, while Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia were added later on. Eventually, the programme studies covered 14 countries. The studies were designed to have direct academic relevance but also to generate debate and to contain policy recommendations.

Structural Adjustment took the “postcolonial model of development” as the starting point for analysis of the politics of adjustment. This model holds that colonialism left a legacy of under- and unequal development in Africa. Many governments in newly independent countries therefore regarded the market and private entrepreneurship as unsuitable to the massive task of social transformation to eliminate poverty and modernise the country. The postcolonial development model, therefore, recognised the state as the principal steering mechanism in the economy. The state would take the lead by mobilising the masses, industrialising through import substitution, modernising agriculture and physical and social infrastructure, and much more.

With few exceptions, African leaders were attracted to this model, which appeared to be successful in the first decade of independence. Signs of crisis emerged in the late 1970s, while the 1980s became a decade of recession in Africa. Agriculture stagnated, industrialisation did not take off, terms of trade deteriorated and per capita income shrank. The state could no longer sustain social services and its legitimacy suffered. However, popular frustration could not be voiced as there were few political arenas open to the public.

In the 1980s, the donor community began to impose conditions on development cooperation. Donors demanded liberalisation of external and internal trade, financial reform, scaling back of public institutions, privatisation and, eventually, political pluralism. Despite considerable friction between recipients and donors (led by the World
Bank and the IMF), most African governments adopted structural adjustment plans. These varied from country to country, but a common strand ran through them: state relinquishment of absolute control of the economy (including price controls), public sector and politics. Consequently, African countries underwent fundamental socioeconomic and political change.

**Structural adjustment:** Fiscal crises and foreign exchange shortages meant that African Government funding for public services declined. They turned to the IMF, the World Bank and bilateral donors for assistance. The conditions attached to assistance became known as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). They included additional lending, grants and debt forgiveness. The short-term conditions imposed included devaluation and financial austerity. The long-term conditions included policy changes (privatisation of public enterprises, deregulation of prices and interest rates, free trade, etc.). The conditions were expected to stem the deterioration of African economies that had been evident for a decade. It was assumed that foreign investment would be attracted and that resource use would become more efficient.

The imposition of SAPs on sometimes reluctant African governments triggered massive academic and popular debate on the causes of the failure of Africa’s economic growth. Critics argued that the SAPs were designed with little regard for local conditions. As a result, many SAPs were poorly implemented. The lasting impact was that African economies were opened up to the international market, and deregulation and privatisation took place. However, poverty did not decrease drastically. In the late 1990s the World Bank and bilateral donors shifted their funding emphasis towards poverty alleviation.
Implementation

The programme was in existence from 1990 to 2001. Its coordinators were Dr Peter Gibbon (United Kingdom) during the first phase (1990-94) and Dr Adebayo Olukoshi (Nigeria) during the second (1995-2000). The coordinator was recruited as a full-time NAI employee, while several researchers were engaged on a short-term basis for specific studies.

*Structural Adjustment* was NAI’s third research programme and could draw on the organisational experience acquired during the two previous programmes (*Arid Lands and Small Towns*). This was reflected in the organisation of the studies. Whereas the first two NAI research programmes were based on a combination of the programme coordinators’ personal research and open calls by the coordinators for theme-based conference papers, the programme coordinator of *Structural Adjustment* obtained a dedicated budget from SIDA to commission new research on agreed topics. The aim was to include topics of specific interest to SIDA as well as to build capacity among younger African researchers, whom the coordinator would mentor. The researchers selected had normally just completed some postgraduate training, but not necessarily at doctoral level. SIDA favoured this approach for several reasons, including capacity building, but also because the authority believed these African researchers would act as local “sparring partners” for SIDA and Swedish embassy staff in the countries being studied.

The major feature of the implementation strategy was identifying African researchers active in fields relevant to the programme. There were detailed procedures for the selection of case studies and identification of authors. NAI and the authors entered into contracts that set out the budget, timeframe and deliverables.

Invitations were sent out mainly to political economists, political scientists and sociologists for concept papers and later concrete research proposals of a cross-country comparative nature. NAI then assessed the incoming proposals and signed contracts with the researchers selected. More than twenty researchers were recruited for the programme. Contracts varied in length from a few months to more
than a year depending on the scope of the study to be undertaken. A network of African scholars was developed to conduct the studies. A conscious effort was made to include more women academics in the studies. The programme also promoted research among Nordic scholars, especially for projects dealing with the politics of structural adjustment among donor agencies.

An initial workshop was held to determine the research content and methodology of the programme. The actual research used participant observation, case studies, focus group discussions, interviews as well as questionnaire surveys. Research results were presented at workshops and subsequently at conferences.

During the first phase, research work brought together analyses of the underpinnings of donor policy-formulation as well as the national political responses among “adjusting” African countries. Particularly important was the impact of the policies on democratisation/authoritarianism in national political systems. Eight full-scale research projects were initiated, six of which were completed and reported on. The remaining two were also reported on at the end of phase I but were carried over to the second phase.

During this second phase, 14 projects were commissioned. Research now increasingly focused on the implications of structural adjustment at sectoral and sub-sectoral levels, emphasising inter alia privatisation of trade, land markets and social provisioning.

In designing the research projects, attention was paid both to the evidence contained in the publications from the first phase and to the work of other relevant research networks, including UNRISD (Geneva), CODESRIA (Dakar), SAPES (Harare) and CDR (Copenhagen).

**Outputs**

Empirical studies were conducted in 14 countries. Twelve workshops/conferences were held. Close to 100 researchers were involved, the majority based in African countries. More than 30 books and research reports were published by NAI, and some 30 articles and book
chapters were published externally, including several in international peer-reviewed journals.

At the end of the programme, high profile efforts to disseminate the findings were undertaken. Seminars were held with development cooperation officials in all the Nordic countries as well as with African policy-makers. A plenary meeting was held in Copenhagen in 1998, bringing together most of the researchers who had been involved in the studies since the programme’s inception in 1990. At the meeting, findings and conclusions at sectoral, country and international levels were presented by programme staff and short summaries of the individual projects were distributed. Additional synthesis and dissemination meetings took place in subsequent years.

Programme outputs published by NAI are detailed in the appendix at the end of the chapter.

Main research findings

*Structural Adjustment* covered both the theoretical debate on SAP and empirical case studies.

At the theoretical level, analyses addressed the neoliberal debate on the causes of the African crisis; the ideological underpinnings of IMF/World Bank and donor policies; and the character of African state power and the political and economic significance of non-state economic actors and sectors. The guiding aim was to uncover adjustment’s unintended as well as intended consequences, and their significance for development.

The political analysis was highlighted in several reports and in *Authoritarianism, Democracy and Adjustment*, a book based on a conference held immediately after the programme’s inception in 1990. The arguments advanced were that SAPs were deeply unpopular, including among the urban middle class and bureaucracy. SAPs could therefore only be implemented through repression. This posed a challenge for African governments, since cutting back on state administration was part of SAP. Hence, a selective scaling down of state functions occurred: ministries and authorities charged with providing
public services (health, education and infrastructure) were downsized, while repressive state institutions remained intact. Reductions in public services increased discontent among the general public and also alienated the salaried civil service, many of whom were made redundant. This process led to increasing authoritarianism, the studies showed. A corollary of this analysis was that SAPs could trigger popular movements demanding democracy.

The country case studies and sector studies based on the work commissioned after 1990 provided empirical findings on the operation of SAPs on the ground. Sector studies were undertaken on agriculture, mining, textile and metal industries, health, the labour market, the informal sector, the NGO sector, political interest groups and religious movements. Gender issues were specifically addressed in some of the reports. In parallel, 14 country case studies were conducted.

The studies were not methodologically uniform and achieved different levels of finalisation. Nevertheless, they addressed related scenarios.

One set of findings highlighted the links between private sector and state. SAP advocates assumed that private economic initiatives would blossom when state regulation and intervention decreased, while new market signals would unleash private enterprise. The studies showed the contrary. The private sector had been dependent on the state and when state capacity was eroded, the private sector did not have the capacity to generate growth on its own, at least in the short term.

Market reform implied austerity in state budgets, which everywhere took its toll on publicly provided social services. In practice, this meant closed clinics, schools without teaching materials, dilapidated university laboratories, abolished subsidies for agricultural inputs, run-down roads, etc.

In urban areas, real incomes declined in the face of deregulated food prices, new fees for school and health care and loss of salaried income after many civil servants were made redundant. This triggered labour shifts into the informal sector, growing food crops in
the backyard ("urban agriculture") and even migration by part of the household back to the countryside in search of subsistence.

However, not everyone was a loser. Privatisation and liberalisation also created opportunities for state and local government officials to buy up public assets at bargain prices, developing new spheres of operation and continuing corrupt practices. Local NGOs were hailed by the international community as harbingers of civil society (and by extension, democracy). Many of the studies, however, found that some NGOs worked for the narrow interests of their leadership, and operated in authoritarian fashion as mechanisms for top-down patronage or as launching pads for aspiring politicians.

Although research capacity-building was an important aim, the ultimate goal of the programme was to contribute to the body of knowledge on structural adjustment. The studies generated a wealth of findings, but only a few common threads can be addressed here. On the methodological side, the programme concluded that sweeping macro-generalisations are of limited value. This is because policies have different effects for men and women, and for urban/rural, small/large enterprises. Thus, the impacts can only be fully understood through micro-analysis based on comprehensive fieldwork and disaggregated data. On the substantive side, the overwhelming body of data clearly showed that SAPs had failed to achieve their objectives and had worsened the welfare and quality of life of large segments of the population in the countries studied. Moreover, the findings showed that without national and local ownership, reforms are unlikely to be effectively implemented.

**Evaluation**

Prof. Martin Doornbos (Social Studies Institute, The Hague) carried out an external evaluation in 1996. He considered the programme, then still ongoing, to be highly relevant and productive. The centrality of structural adjustment in shaping the African economies and societies was beyond dispute. NAI had therefore made a forward-looking decision in launching this highly policy-relevant and com-
prehensive research programme. The number of events (workshops, etc.) and publications was substantial. The evaluator also commended the quality of the output. The reviewed publications met all the standard criteria of academic professionalism. Some publications were considered innovative and as providing new perspectives, and were well received internationally. Others were considered to be fairly descriptive but still sound. All of them added to the body of knowledge on the impact of structural adjustment on African countries and to the understanding of the politics and determinants of World Bank and other donor policies.

The evaluator remarked critically on the heterogeneity of the publications. For example, one volume contained one article on each of the national grain market, NGOs and churches. These three articles were considered well researched and interesting, but their connection to the main theme was not always clear.

Regarding interdisciplinarity, Prof. Doornbos noted that the “political economy” approach adopted by the programme itself bespoke this. However, the “political” dimension of the studies was far more evident than the “economic.” This may have impeded possible dialogue with mainstream economists (including World Bank staff) doing research on structural adjustment.

In summing up, the evaluator emphasised that the programme was successful in its own right, and that it further contributed to capacity-building through its strong reliance on Africa-based scholarship.

The second phase was not externally evaluated. However, from the outputs and reviews of the publications, it is clear that the programme retained its relevance and high quality. Among the book reviews in the NAI archives related to publications from the second phase, most are positive and appreciative. Among the criticisms in some reviews, one theme recurs, namely that most studies find some justification for attributing to SAPs the most negative socioeconomic changes in the countries considered. Thus, the “incessant IMF and World Bank bashing” may have seemed like ideological assertions by authors rather than a result of their rigorous analyses.
Impact

With the support of the programme, African researchers involved in *Structural Adjustment* subsequently organised themselves into research networks in their home countries. Some groups, notably in Ghana and Nigeria, were formally registered as research NGOs and managed to secure funding for follow-up research. Many of the young scholars participating in the capacity-building activities associated with NAI’s programme are today important participants both in research and in policy implementation in their home countries. By way of example, the two most recent executive directors of CODESRIA were major participants in the programme.

While it is difficult to isolate unique policy impacts of NAI’s programme, it, together with a range of other contributions, can certainly be credited with promoting wider recognition among donors of adjustment’s unintended consequences and drawbacks. These included various instances of so-called “market failure” (particularly in agriculture). The programme contributed to the general acceptance among donors that, at the very least, adjustment needed to be complemented by compensatory interventions for it to be workable politically and acceptable economically. Arguably, the programme also contributed to better understanding among donors that “ownership” of adjustment, even by local political elites, was deeply problematic and that conditionality-based lending was not politically workable in the long run.

In terms of later research, two strands of influence can be claimed. First, the approach of analysing adjustment (or liberalisation) impacts at sectoral level using political economy tools became widely adopted. Among the later research programmes to do so were “Globalisation and Economic Change in Africa,” undertaken by Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen and the University of Copenhagen (1999-2003), and the ESCOR-financed programme on experiences of liberalisation in African cotton systems, led by Colin Poulton of Imperial College London, and involving researchers from five African countries (2000-04). Second, the approach of examining local-level
structural changes triggered by liberalisation was one inspiration for the RuralStruc research programme led by Bruno Losch at the World Bank and financed mainly by the French Ministry of Development Cooperation (2004-09).

The researchers involved in the NAI programme continued their research into this and related topics over several years. Some formed country-based working groups attached to their home institutions, while others joined international organisations. In particular, CODESRIA’s agenda was influenced by the programme, including its approach to policy advice.

Indeed, the programme had a direct influence on policy. In 1997, NAI collaborated with the African Development Institute of the African Development Bank to convene a conference styled “Partnership Africa.” This explored guiding principles for post-structural adjustment relationships between African countries and the donor community. The conclusions from the conference provided a significant input to the Swedish government’s new Africa policy.
APPENDIX

Workshops and conferences

- Structural Adjustment in Political and Social Context in sub-Saharan Africa (conference held in Bergen, 1990)
- Donor Policies for the Adjustment Process (workshop held in Uppsala, 1991)
- Structural Adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa: New Research Directions (conference held in Harare, 1992)
- The State, Structural Adjustment and Changing Social and Political Relations in Africa (workshop held in Uppsala, 1992)
- Structural Adjustment and Socioeconomic Change in sub-Saharan Africa (workshop held in Maseru, 1992)
- Understanding Political Change in sub-Saharan Africa (workshop held in Maseru, 1992)
- Experiences of Political Liberalisation in sub-Saharan Africa (workshop held in Copenhagen, 1993)
- Socioeconomic Issues in Structural Adjustment Research in Africa (workshop held in Harare, 1995)
- Structural Adjustment and Socioeconomic Change in Contemporary Africa: Review Seminar (workshop held in Abidjan, 1997)
- Youth and Urban Popular Identities in Contemporary Africa (workshop held in Gaborone, 1998)
- Structural Adjustment and Socioeconomic Change in Contemporary Africa (synthesis conference of the whole programme held in Copenhagen, 1998)
- Structural Adjustment and Socioeconomic Change in West Africa (final dissemination conference held in Lagos, 2001)
Publications

(arranged chronologically)


Olukoshi, A. and L. Laakso (eds.) Challenges to the Nation State in Africa (NAI, 1996)


Sachikonye, L.M. Restructuring or De-Industrializing? Zimbabwe’s Textile and Metal Industries under Structural Adjustment (NAI Research Report No. 110, 1999)


Moyo, S. Land Reform under Structural Adjustment in Zimbabwe: Land Use Change in Mashonaland Provinces (NAI, 2000)


Jega, A. Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria (NAI, 2000)

CHAPTER 6

*Poverty and Prosperity in Africa: Local and Global Perspectives (1994–99)*

**Context**

Concerns about mass poverty in Africa have been on the development agenda since the early 1970s, when the UN system, including the World Bank, set out a vision to eliminate malnutrition and illiteracy, reduce infant mortality and raise life expectancy by the end of the century. The first generation of poverty alleviation strategies focused on education and health, together with income-generating measures. The scope soon widened and the multidimensionality of poverty was acknowledged.

By the mid-1990s, “development” equaled “poverty alleviation.” Widespread poverty in Africa was seen as the major stumbling block to national development. Development cooperation agencies undertook poverty assessments and elaborated aid strategies that were supposed to root out poverty, while aid-receiving African governments were supposed to incorporate poverty alleviation into their national planning. A body of literature on how to define and measure poverty emerged, and anti-poverty programmes were devised for statistically defined target groups. Standard indicators included income, material assets (buildings, land, implements) and nutritional status. Research on poverty as a societal phenomenon also included non-economic concepts such as (lack of) access to information, knowledge, skills and participation in decision-making, as well as security. A gendered approach was gradually included, as research revealed that poverty alleviation programmes have different implications for men and women.

It was in this context that NAI decided to launch a research programme focused specifically on poverty in Africa and the concepts and ideologies underpinning current definitions of poverty. The research programme *Poverty and Prosperity* was intended to complement the three earlier research programmes launched by NAI.
Poverty

Systematic studies on poverty originated in late-19th century Britain. “Absolute” poverty was defined as lack of income and other resources at a level where survival was at stake. Such situations were considered to arise from problems over which one had no control, such as loss of employment, widowhood, etc. By contrast, “relative” poverty applies when a person or family lacks resources to live a life (consumption, participation in social activities, etc.) at the same level as other members of local society.

Poverty analysis has been central to development discourse in the second half of the 20th century. The World Bank developed quantitative measurements – most famously the “dollar-a-day” definition. Development projects were designed to target poor groups and help them improve their productivity. The “basic needs” approach was developed by the International Labour Organisation. It focused on access to food and basic social services. Both approaches set out to measure income, assets and services, or the lack of them. Recognition of the limits of these measurements prompted poverty analysis to embrace concepts of power and politics. Poverty was conceptualised in terms of social relations – especially social exclusion – and deprivation of capabilities.

These methodologies and theories were developed by the non-poor, mainly experts in international organisations. By contrast, the “participatory” approach sought to include the women and men (or at least members of local communities) who regarded themselves as poor according to their own judgements. Their perceptions of poverty were invariably multidimensional. In this way, it was thought, a more profound understanding could be gained of how villagers define and look upon themselves and their neighbours, which problems they consider paramount and how they
tackle them. Some elements of this approach were included in, for instance, the World Bank's 2000 report, *Voices of the Poor – Crying Out for Change*, and in the International Fund for Agricultural Development’s *Rural Poverty Report 2011*.

The discourse on poverty continues to be multifaceted and different analytical schools abound.

**Purpose and theoretical approach**

According to the *Poverty and Prosperity* research programme, at the generic core of poverty lie primary questions of power and sociability. Far from being a straightforward condition of deprivation and destitution that is easily defined empirically, poverty is a contentious and complex construct, an archetypal “thick” discourse, encapsulating a vast range of social, political and historical struggles and constantly evolving values.

*Poverty and Prosperity* looked beyond simplistic definitions of poverty and sought to probe the images and concepts of poverty underpinning donor definitions and to contrast these with the ways in which African societies conceptualise and deal with poverty. It set out to reveal biases and, in particular, to investigate the self-images of those whom outsiders define as poor. It also looked at the historical background, notably how colonialism, missionary activities and foreign aid have influenced the concept of poverty.

Six interconnected research fields were identified, including the genealogy of the concept of poverty, poverty discourses and development interventions, poverty and gender. Most of the 30 case studies conducted within the programme dealt with pastoralist societies in Eastern Africa.

Environmental policies were also given much attention in the
programme. A number of research studies compared colonial environmental protection policies with those pursued by African governments since independence. The purpose of the comparison was to assess to what extent environmental policies tended to increase or decrease poverty among local populations.

Implementation
The programme was launched in 1994. Prof. Vigdis Broch-Due (Norway) was recruited as programme coordinator. During the first year, a network of researchers was established and research collaboration was initiated, including an arrangement with the Gender Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The literature on the nature of poverty in Africa was reviewed and a series of occasional papers was initiated as a pace-setter for the research. In the following years, fieldwork was conducted, seminars held and research findings produced. Special funding was secured for one particular research component, “Poverty, Conflict and Gender: The Politics of Reconstruction and Redistribution,” which focused on the intersection between poverty, gender and conflict and built on earlier research cooperation between the programme coordinator and LSE. This project involved case studies from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia. It included collaboration with African researchers and institutions in the areas of conflict assessment and management and incorporated a gender-sensitive perspective.

An external evaluation of the programme has not been conducted. However, NAI conducted a mid-term review and agreed that the programme should continue for a second phase. It was concluded in 1999.

Outputs
Six workshops/conferences were held, while eight books and research reports were published.

A series of occasional papers and of research reports was separately created as an outlet for research results. There were 12 occasional papers in total and 11 research reports.
The programme coordinator also contributed several articles and chapters to books published internationally.

The programme’s outputs are detailed in the appendix at the end of the chapter.

Main research findings
The programme explored self-perceptions and community consciousness, specifically how pastoralist identity has been made in opposition to other modes of production, how pastoralists want others to see them and how they see themselves. The research questioned assumptions of pastoral egalitarianism and posed questions about creeping poverty, changing patterns of wealth and accumulation, the impact of diminishing resources on pastoral communities and the impact of external values regarding land, labour and livestock.

The anthologies edited by the programme coordinator include articles on pastoralists, forest dwellers and subsistence agriculturalists in places remote from national centres. The research explored the concepts and perceptions of poverty in these localities as well as the reasons for this poverty. Several lines of research were pursued. One major theme was that colonial policy severely constrained the livelihoods of pastoralists by redefining their territories and cutting them off from places crucial to their typically migratory way of life. Sanctions were imposed on some of their economic activities, taxes were levied, assets (domestic animals) were confiscated and in some cases military operations were mounted that destroyed the social and political fabric of the communities. Some pastoral groups were forcibly relocated to make way for European settlers. Thus, the authors argued, poverty was not an original state but was, rather, produced by colonial policy and practice. The authors also showed that independent African governments have continued to pursue similar policies and thus to produce poverty.

Poverty and Prosperity also investigated the clash between colonial and African (in this case pastoralist) definitions of territory and identity. The authors argued that colonial discourse was based on a
European vision of sedentary “tribes” and fixed territory, with specific groups being attached to specific territories. A person is thus identified with a specific place (village, region and nation). This concept is totally foreign to pastoralists, whose territories are fluid and identities can be modified. Pastoralist groups before colonialism traversed vast tracts according to rainfall patterns, herd size and composition and grazing opportunities. In the process, one group could push aside another and adopt its members into its fold. The research demonstrated that the pastoralist identity is not tied to a specific area. The differing interpretations of belonging, place and ethnicity created conflict when colonial administrators started to define tribes and fix their homelands in specific geographical places.

Several contributions in Poverty and Prosperity noted that colonial policy was much preoccupied with environmental issues, especially deforestation and land degradation in the form of soil erosion and vegetation loss. The blame was often placed on the farmers and herders, whose cultivation and herding practices were considered inefficient and wasteful of resources. Colonial policy therefore put in place control measures for the supposed benefit of the environment. The “carrying capacity” of grazing lands was analysed and calculated and destocking measures implemented. Forests were protected, thereby restricting farmers’ access to gather non-timber products. Soil conservation techniques (contour bunds on sloping land, tree planting and protection of water resources) were introduced and enforced, and required additional labour inputs from farmers.

After independence, most of these measures were abolished or at least disregarded. Aspiring nationalist leaders railed against compulsory soil conservation work in their campaigns against the colonial authorities and in mobilising support for independence. However, Poverty and Prosperity described how enforced environmental policies reappeared in the 1980s, this time with international donor funding and spearheaded by international environmentalist NGOs. The backdrop was the environmental debate emerging worldwide, which included concerns about biodiversity and the fear that the last
“pristine” natural resources were in danger because of habitat loss to burgeoning farming and herding populations in developing countries, notably in Africa. The UN report Our Common Future (1987) postulated that the elimination of poverty was a prerequisite to environmental protection. Sustainable development became the new mantra around which environmental policies were framed. The resurgence of concern about the environment took place at a time when African countries were subject to structural adjustment (see chapter 5). As government budgets faced austerity, a new avenue of funding opened up. The donors mobilised huge amounts of money for environmental projects, which was channelled through government agencies and NGOs alike.

Poverty and Prosperity projects demonstrated in detail how NGOs, backed by state authorities and funded by donors, designed and implemented policies that led to increased poverty among the already marginalised populations living in or near demarcated environmental hot spots. Such policies included eviction of forest-dwelling groups and creating buffer zones around national parks and other protected areas that locals could use in only restricted ways. An industry grew up around environmental protection. Game viewing, bird walks, photo safaris and the like proliferated, as did luxurious lodges and hotels where log-fire dinners were served while local artist groups performed native dances. Specially constructed roads and airstrips facilitated communication with the capitals. While nature thus became commercialised and international companies and national entrepreneurs made money, participation by local populations was limited. Some jobs as cleaners, guards, etc. were created, but the majority of locals were simply pushed to the margins.

An innovative aspect of the research programme was its investigation of non-pastoralist African perceptions of pastoralists. For example, townspeople tend to look down on visiting Maasai herdsmen. Their ethnic clothing, body ornamentation and behaviour are considered to be at odds with the “modern” aspirations of townspeople. Their resistance to education and their general lifestyle is likewise
despised by townspeople. They represent a stagnant past that urban Africans have left behind. This image is reinforced by the fascination shown by foreign tourists who flock to Maasai homesteads to observe their “primitivism.”

Local and national planning authorities share a negative image of pastoralists. Against the backdrop of recurrent drought in East Africa, pastoralist production is considered outmoded and as having no future. Development efforts therefore focus on “sedentarisation,” that is, settlement and a switch to agriculture. While modern planners see the reduction of herds and moves towards sedentarisation and agriculture as the pathways to prosperity, pastoralists tend to see them as the very definition of poverty itself.

Some contributions to *Poverty and Prosperity* reviewed settlement schemes for pastoralist groups. There were few successes. On the other hand, experiments in restocking herds have been more successful, but have at the same time created winners (households with relatively large herds) and losers (households with inadequate herds). The research highlighted several development schemes in Maasai areas focused on improving cattle productivity through veterinary services, waterholes, improved marketing, etc. Most of these projects were, upon final evaluation, considered to be failures. Two main reasons were cited for this: they were based on erroneous premises, and they completely ignored gender relations in Maasai society. The main mistaken assumption was that Maasai raise cattle for beef, when in fact their main purpose is milk production. Also, the projects ignored small stock, even though goats and sheep are important as food. Training and asset projects addressed only Maasai men, on the assumption that a pastoralist is a man, while a woman cares for homestead and children. In reality, Maasai women have important responsibilities in the pastoralist mode of production. They are in charge of and have decision-making power with respect to rearing calves and small stock as well as milking cows. As the schemes targeted only male Maasai, even for milking components, they tended to erode women’s rights and responsibilities while strengthening the view that the man is the sole
owner and controller of the whole production process.

Most poverty assessments are rooted in criteria defined by outsiders (donors, state administrators, NGOs). *Poverty and Prosperity* delved into how pastoralists themselves define poverty. The main finding was that “the poor are not us,” that is people with a reasonable herd are by definition well off. This is the traditional self-perception of Eastern African pastoralist societies. The poor are defined as those without livestock as well as the farmers who are “forced” to cultivate the soil. The authors maintained that this image is idealised and obscures the internal dynamics of pastoral economy. For instance, it often happens that families lose their herds to cattle raids, disease or for other reasons, and become destitute. The research on Turkana pastoralists in Kenya showed how those unfortunate members who have lost their cattle and small stock to accidents, raids, sickness and the like cease to function as pastoralist households. They are excluded from the community and settle in small nearby towns as camp dwellers or daily workers. Their poverty is a consequence of their no longer being cattle owners. Thus, by ousting and forgetting unfortunate households, pastoralist communities can uphold the notion of themselves as egalitarian.

**Impact**

*Poverty and Prosperity* was a continuation of the strong tradition at NAI of research into the fundamental livelihood issues facing pastoralist societies in Eastern Africa. The researchers have since embarked on follow-up projects and have published widely in international journals.

Meanwhile, drought has continued to afflict Eastern Africa and, as usual, the drylands are worst hit. As mentioned in chapter 3, only in Kenya are serious efforts being made to mitigate the situation, while in the other affected countries, civil strife and banditry make rehabilitation programmes difficult. Pastoralist societies have been on the brink of disaster several times. A century ago, rinderpest swept through Eastern Africa with devastating consequences: some 80 per
cent of cattle perished. However, pastoralism survived and herds gradually recovered.

There is nevertheless reason to ask what the future holds for the pastoralist way of life in Eastern Africa. Research in *Poverty and Prosperity* indicates that during the last two decades of the 20th century particularly devastating processes have arisen, in addition to the recurrent droughts. Political breakdown has led to civil wars and escalating raids between ethnic groups, with firearms replacing spears. These have undermined the basis for pastoralism. Loss of herds is no longer an occasional fate that befalls only families: rather, whole communities now experience losses. The continuing expansion of farming into semi-arid lands heightens the crisis of pastoralism. In this situation, households with small herds buckle at an accelerating pace. The constant attrition of the meagre resources leads to the eventual dislodgement of smaller and less wealthy households from the pastoralist way of life and their joining the urban destitute. Although the conception that “the poor are not us” lingers, pastoralists are increasingly realising that they are poor, even if they still have herds.
APPENDIX

Workshops and conferences

■ Poverty and Pastoralism in Eastern Africa (workshop held in Uppsala, 1995)
■ The Dynamics of Local Economy in Africa (workshop held in Helsinki, 1996)
■ The Politics of Poverty and Environmental Interventions (workshop held in Stockholm, 1997)
■ Poverty and Prosperity: the Politics of Wealth (workshop held in Uppsala, 1997)
■ Conflict’s Fruits: Poverty, Violence and the Politics of Identity in African Arenas (conference held in Copenhagen, 1999)
■ Understanding Conflict and Violence (workshop held at Nordic Africa days, Uppsala, 1999)

Publications

(arranged chronologically)

Broch Due, V. Feminisering av Fattigdom (Seminar Proceedings UNESCO and CROP, 1995)


Broch Due, V. “Creation and the Multiple Female Body: Turkana Perspectives on Gender and Cosmos”, in Moore, H.L., B. Kaare and T. Sanders (eds) Those who Play with Fire: Gender, Fertility and Transformation in East and Southern Africa (LSE monographs on Social Anthropology, 1999)

Anderson, D. and V. Broch-Due (eds) The Poor are not Us: Poverty and Pastoralism in Eastern Africa (James Curry and Ohio University Press, 1999 and NAI, 2000)


Broch-Due, V. Violence and Belonging: The Quest for Identity in Post Colonial Africa (Routledge, 2005)
CHAPTER 7

Cultural Images in and of Africa (1995-2010)

Context

The Cultural Images in and of Africa research programme was launched in 1995 in response to two research needs. The predominantly negative and one-sided images of Africa in Nordic countries and in the West required analysis and explanation. At the same time, the multifaceted images of Africa emerging from the dynamics of contemporary arts in Africa had by and large been neglected in Nordic African research. This field was all the more fascinating given that early post-independence calls for artists to serve nation-building efforts had made way in many African countries for a greater variety of cultural and artistic expressions, which flourished often independently of government guidance and sponsorship.

Purpose and theoretical approach

Cultural Images in and of Africa (henceforth Cultural Images) thus had a dual purpose. It aimed at encouraging both the study of cultural images of Africa, that is, how the Western world constructs an image of Africa as something different and inferior, as well as cultural images in Africa, in other words, contemporary cultural expressions by African artists and writers. Cultural Images encouraged research and debate on modern cultural developments in Africa as well as research into the images of Africa in sources such as Nordic literature, missionary reports and contemporary Nordic textbooks for schools. It also encouraged analysis of modern cultural products and expressions from Africa from the perspective of social and aesthetic understanding. The programme thus sought to contribute to the analysis of African identity formation, as well as to the investigation of African images of Africa.

Cultural Images consciously integrated networking among scholars and dissemination of research results and information. It devel-
oped an umbrella approach by including several sub-themes within the framework.

Culture was defined as contemporary artistic expressions, such as literature, dance, sculpture, film, pictorial and plastic arts. A wider definition of culture, to include tradition, religion, social norms, etc., provided the backdrop against which art forms were described and analysed. The programme concentrated on art created in African cities for an urban audience, and – very importantly – often for an international audience.

Although Africa is a huge and widely diverse continent, and although *Cultural Images* critiqued stereotyped generalisations, it also reflected the understanding of an African identity in the shared historical legacy of the slave trade, colonialism and continuing inequalities.

The constituent studies addressed the issues by exploring a wide range of cultural fields, including literature, music, film, popular drama, contemporary dance and sculpture. It was the ambition of the programme to provide highlights of African cultural production, not to provide a complete overview.

**Implementation**
The coordinator was Mai Palmberg (Finland), while NAI administrative staff assisted in arranging workshops and with invitations to guest writers and researchers. The programme was financed out of NAI’s regular budget, with additional funding for specific events being provided by external donors.

From the outset, the programme created a network of researchers and cultural practitioners in the Nordic countries, Africa and elsewhere for cooperative purposes and as contacts.

The active members in the *Cultural Images* network were drawn from the humanities (literature, the arts, music, history, missionary history, linguistics), but also from the border-crossing disciplines of anthropology and pedagogy, and from mass media studies, political science and sociology. The research methodology reflected the con-
ceptual discourses of these disciplines, and contributed to a multidisciplinary exchange.

The programme saw “reflecting artists” from Africa as important sources. A special project involving interviews with Zimbabwean artists was undertaken by the coordinator between 2002 and 2010, the interviews being published on the web. The final book, *KulTur i Afrika*, also contained interviews with artists from different genres. These interviews fed the artists’ reflections into the programme and added raw material for future culture research.

Most of the published material from the programme was produced by scholars. Workshops were organised at NAI’s Nordic Africa Days, basically every other year, and one led to the anthology, *Same and Other* (2001). Two genre-specific workshops on cinema and theatre research on Africa were convened. However, the main research results came from six “call for papers” conferences, held in Denmark, South Africa, Finland, Zimbabwe, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The programme endeavoured to give space to African scholars and artists, not to seek *the* African voice, but to expand opportunities for hearing different African reflections and studies.

The programme coordinator, together with informal groups of contributors, decided on the topics for the workshops. The research then proceeded in the form of papers prepared for the workshops and conferences. These were further elaborated and edited to be included in published books. Texts to be published were reviewed by a reader within or outside the network before submission for publication.

*Cultural Images* established an electronic forum, which attracted some 300 subscribers. It shared information on all programme activities, related conferences and grants, provided links to relevant websites and functioned as a discussion forum.

A series of public meetings was arranged involving Nordic writers who had written extensively on Africa. They were held at the NAI library, but were soon transformed into encounters with African writers visiting the Nordic countries. Their purpose was to introduce interesting writing, supplement social science studies and mass media
information as sources of knowledge about Africa and also to counteract one-sided and negative images of Africa by showing complexity and creativity. Altogether these encounters included 7 Swedish writers, one Finnish writer and 31 African writers.

In addition, African writers were invited to Uppsala for a three-month period. They were offered the opportunity to reflect and write while they also travelled through the Nordic countries giving lectures and seminars. Six writers, from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa took part in this programme component.

Outputs

Cultural Images gave rise to 19 workshops/conferences (involving close to 500 participants), 11 books as well as several published articles and conference papers. Some of the papers were edited for inclusion in books generated by the programme published by NAI, while others were published in journals and books elsewhere.

Four anthologies were published on the basis of call-for-paper conferences, one on democracy and national identity in South Africa (together with the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape), one on “Encounter images”, one on the concept “African” in African cultural production, and one on identities and contemporary music in Africa. In addition two single-author studies were published on the images of Africa: one on Swedish school books by the coordinator and a historical study on images of Africa in Iceland by a member in the network. A web based collection of interviews with Zimbabwean artists and cultural workers, was initiated in 2003 and continually augmented. The coordinator participated with chapters in four externally published anthologies.

The outputs are detailed in the appendix at the end of the chapter.

Main research findings

The aspect of the programme that most successfully and visibly influenced public debate beyond academia was the on-going focus on Nordic images of Africa.
The starting assumption was that every society displays ethnocentrism, a tendency to see one’s own community as the centre of the world, and its traditions, beliefs and customs as the yardstick for the “normal.” This is also true of European and Nordic images of Africa. But the programme went deeper than this, and examined the “othering” of Africa largely on the basis of Western notions of evolution and the hierarchical stages of development. In this way, the programme inscribed itself into postcolonial discourse, which sees colonialism as a global process, even today affecting both colonised and colonisers, and the latter’s cultural and economic allies.

The first set of research findings to be published was *Encounter Images in the Meetings between Africa and Europe* (2001), based on a conference in Denmark in 1996. Missionary views of Africans and African culture were analysed in several of the papers. The arena of communication was noted as crucial: missionaries writing in church papers to canvas for funds described problems but also progress, while private correspondence could be racist and dismissive. The conference agreed that Western images of Africa are not like a window through which we see Africa more or less clearly, but are, rather, like a mirror, with the ideas of our own society constituting the primary element.

A separate project supported by the programme was that dealing with Icelandic images of Africa, undertaken by Kristin Lofsdottir.

The overall programme returned to images of Africa in the mid-2000s with the launch of “The Nordic Colonial Mind” project. This examined whether there was a basis for “Nordic exceptionalism.” Scepticism about this proposition flowed from the history of race biology, the Danish and Swedish colonial enterprises in the Caribbean slave economies and the growing consciousness of the significant Scandinavian participation in the conquest of the Congo basin. This project was continued, and still continues, as an Icelandic-Norwegian-Danish project.

The programme also conducted studies on images of Africa in the school books. An earlier book (written by the coordinator in 1987 before the programme started) analysed the portrayal of Africa
in Swedish school books. It showed that there were both old and new prejudices in Swedish school books and that an assumption of helplessness was seen to colour the texts. The second, which came out in 2000, was a close thematic analysis of 46 textbooks, and asked whether schools provided an adequate foundation for an attitude of partnership with Africa. It concluded that a mixture of residual colonial Eurocentricism and awkwardness in coming to terms with the multicultural world in Africa and Sweden was still evident.

The content analysis used in the studies contrasted with that frequently found in communication studies, whereby text units are labelled and tallied as positive, negative or neutral. Rather, NAI’s programme rested on an analysis of reasons for and background to patterns of representation. The omission of relevant material was also examined, such as Western links to African conflicts and the slave trade.

The discourse on “modernity” and “tradition” bridged the programme’s study of images of Africa, and its discussion of representations by African artists. In Western eyes, “modernity” is seen as synonymous with Western society, the evident goal for other societies to aspire to and the antithesis of traditional society. The latter is here seen as a despicable state of underdevelopment, which must be discarded for development to take place. But traditional society in Africa has sometimes been seen by Western artists, for instance Picasso, in a romantic way, as the antithesis of depraved industrialism. One conclusion is that while romanticism is virtually absent in Western development discourse, it is significant in views of African arts. The gazes are not as different as they seem. As V.Y. Mudimbe writes, the African had by the 17th century become the Other, which “specifies the identity of the same” (Eriksson Baaz in *Same and Other* 2001). Thus, images of Africa are interesting if one is interested in Africa, but also provide in their “otherness” a key to the construction of Western identity.

In Africa, views on modernity have changed over time. The nationalist movements at the time of independence from 1957 onwards reversed the European pattern of representation. Europe was now the

At the same time, the new states seemingly paradoxically wanted to become modern. Ideas about African modernity are of a later date. Within the programme, this concept was seen as relevant, not least to African artists and scholars of the arts. Modernity was often associated with a stress on the hybrid character of culture and society.

African nationalism still has its adherents in African and black studies in North America, and also in Africa. This “Africanism” posits an essential distinction between positive black/African and negative Western influences. This perspective was viewed by the programme as an understandable reaction to Western colonialism and dominance, but not as an analytical tool for the enhancement of understanding. Interestingly, “Africanist” stances where apparent in many contributions by African scholars to the debates on culture on the NAI-Images List, the e-mail list connecting active members of the programme network.

With respect to “authenticity” and “africanness,” it follows that labelling artistic products, views and modes of behaviour as either “authentic African” or “un-African” can be claimed as legitimate by both Westerners and nationalist Africans. The thrust of the programme was to critique notions of African authenticity, and trace the labelling to essentialist notions of African culture. One example is the renowned stone sculpture movement in Zimbabwe, which was started by a British curator, who was looking for art untainted by European gimmicks. His heritage is a rich stone sculpture tradition, but also mythical ideas about Shona spirituality, whereas many sculptors are not Shona and few are inspired by spiritual themes. Nor does the genre go back centuries, but only to the curator’s arrival in the 1950s.

As regards African arts and the market, it is estimated that 80 per cent of African artists paint for Western buyers wanting naïve and grotesque art. Musicians seeking opportunities in the new “world
music” market sometimes found their music did not satisfy Western expectations of pleasant exoticism.

Most of the programme’s findings, however, affirmed the resistance of artists to creating for Western buyers. In the words of Congolese writer Alain Mainbanckou, Africa gave him his audience, the rest was just market. Since the 1980s, African filmmakers have refrained from serving up exotic traditional culture to satisfy foreign funders.

The contributions to the programme have generally criticised and rejected restrictive definitions of the “genuine” Africa. Africa is both North and sub-Saharan Africa, both peasant and middle class, speaks both metropolitan and indigenous languages, is both black and white. African art is art in Africa, all of it authentic.

At the programme’s end in 2010, the coordinator summed up by saying that the cultural scene in Africa is key to the discourse on Africa’s past and future because artistic expressions offer a richer source of insights than the reporting in mass media, and government or NGO reporting and de-briefing and because of the capacity of the best of them to stir discussion, and sometimes action.

Evaluation

*Cultural Images* was evaluated in 2005 by Prof. Helge Rønning of the University of Oslo. The evaluation was conducted as a desk study combined with interviews with the programme’s key participants. In the main, the assessment was positive, emphasising its impressive productivity in terms of research, networking and documentation/dissemination. The evaluator acknowledged that *Cultural Images* was not a research project in a strict academic sense, but rather a multifaceted programme. This was considered a strength, since the programme managed to attract wide interest among scholars and cultural workers in Africa and the Nordic countries. On the other hand, the evaluator held that the wide net cast by the programme meant it sometimes lost focus and consistency. He further noted a lack of theoretical and methodological stringency. There was no systematic dis-
course of central concepts such as “identity,” “the postcolonial” and “authenticity” in contemporary cultural production in Africa, despite the predominance of theoretical discourses on these concepts in studies of culture.

However, given the broad focus of *Cultural Images* (research, networking, dissemination/documentation), the evaluator considered the lack of strong theoretical base as a less serious shortcoming than it would be in a narrower academic endeavour. The evaluator even suggested that the limited theoretical basis contributed to the innovativeness of the programme’s various initiatives.

Regarding the networking and dissemination components, the evaluator was overwhelmingly positive. The electronic forum provided useful information and at times generated heated debates involving many participants. NAI’s African guest writer component provided opportunities to selected African writers to visit and lecture in Nordic universities. Books generated by the programme have been widely circulated and read. Participation by several hundred people in the 19 workshops organised under the programme in itself indicated the success of the dissemination project.

All the books had been reviewed in professional journals. Overall, the reviews were positive and several of the chapters and included articles were commended for their quality. At the same time, some of the books were considered disjointed and lacking in coherence.

Finally, the evaluation commended the work of the programme coordinator. She was the driving force behind *Cultural Images* and contributed many articles of high quality to the volumes. Her engagement and ability to interact with and bring in participants from many backgrounds helped to create an interest in modern African culture within a wider Africanist context. This achievement is even more impressive given the rather limited resources available to the programme.

The programme took account of the evaluator’s remarks about theoretical stringency. As a result, it subsequently placed more emphasis on current theoretical discourses about cultural expressions.
Impact

Through *Cultural Images*, a strong network of Nordic scholars was created. Over time, the network expanded to include a number of African scholars. The network operated through electronic communication, workshops, conferences, visiting writers and guest researchers. Over 15 years, relations were cemented and many contacts persisted after the programme’s closure. Moreover, as *Cultural Images* was an umbrella programme that included academics, artists and representatives of cultural institutions, it could expand beyond strict academic confines as an instrument of international cultural exchange and dialogue.

The inclusion of Zimbabwean cultural expressions allowed for support and stimulus to be provided to scholars and artists in that country at a time when it was, for political reasons, increasingly isolated.

The discourse furthered by *Cultural Images* represented an important contribution by the humanities to the study of social change in Africa, and, especially in the programme’s focus on the cultural constructions of “us” and “other,” to the study of relations between Africa and Europe. The programme’s value was enhanced by the active participation of African scholars and artists, especially writers. It provided the forums and avenues for a meta-discussion on representations of Africa both in the North and on the continent, a discussion necessary for all research and development discourse. Also highlighted was the role and capacity of Africa’s contemporary artists to express visions and critiques of African societies, and thus to contribute to exchanges on African futures. The publications associated with the programme were positively reviewed and contributed to the debate on culture in Africa. Public discourse and awareness was also promoted through a large number of published interviews and lectures in pedagogical and general contexts. The programme coordinator’s book analysing how Africa was portrayed in Swedish high school textbooks prompted a lively debate in Sweden and the other Nordic countries, and contributed to the reformulation of the texts in later editions.
The impact of the studies of school textbooks was significant. Lists of issues for educators to explore were included, and enhanced the value of the studies in promoting awareness. The first study was widely distributed to teachers and textbook publishers, and also found its way into museums as a critical checklist of stereotypes and prejudices. Additionally, publishers, including the biggest school textbook publishers in Sweden, engaged the programme coordinator to review schoolbook texts prior to publication.

The programme coordinator also undertook a small study of school books in Finland, made presentations at teachers’ colleges and to a national Africa festival.

Finally, the Cultural Images programme was one of the resources drawn on by NAI in inviting African writers to the Africa-themed Gothenburg Book Fair of September 2010.
APPENDIX

Workshops and conferences

- Facing Ethnicities in Africa (conference held in Åbo, 1995 together with the Centre for Continuing Education at Åbo Akademi University)
- Encounter Images in the Meeting between Europe and Africa (conference held in Helsingør, 1996 together with the International Folk High School in Ellsinore)
- National Identity and Democracy (conference held in Cape Town 1997 together with the Mayibuye Centre of the University of the Western Cape)
- Culture and Social Inequality (workshop held in Uppsala at the Nordic Africa Days, 1997)
- Nordic Research Seminar on the Study of African Film (workshop held in Uppsala, 1999)
- The Cultural Images of us and them (workshop held in Uppsala at the Nordic Africa Days 1999)
- Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa (conference held in Åbo, 2000 together with the Sibelius Museum and the Department of Musicology at Åbo Akademi University)
- Globalisation and Cultural Production in Africa (workshop held in Uppsala at the Nordic Africa Days, 2001)
- Workshop on Theatre in Africa (workshop held in Uppsala, 2002)
- Africa Images in the Nordic Public Space (workshop held in Uppsala at the Nordic Africa Days, 2003)
- Looking to the Future: Social, Political and Cultural Space in Zimbabwe (conference held in Uppsala, 2004)
- Foregrounding Cultural Production in Africa (workshop held at the ECAS conference, London, 2005)
- Pictorial Arts and Photography in Africa – Roots and Routes in Tradition and Modernity (workshop held in Uppsala at the Nordic Africa Days, 2005)
- The Nordic Colonial Mind (workshop held in Uppsala, 2006)
- Cultural Construction of the Nation: Which Way Africa? (workshop held at the ECAS conference in Leiden, 2007)
■ Exploring the Roots of the Nordic Colonial Mind (workshop held in Uppsala, 2007)
■ The Cultural Construction of Zimbabwe (conference held in Harare, 2007)
■ The Cultural Construction of Zimbabwe II (conference held in Oxford, 2008 in collaboration with St Anthony’s College)
■ What’s culture got to do with it? (conference held in Uppsala, 2009).

Publications
(arranged chronologically)
Palmberg, M. African Culture for Nordic People (NAI, 1997 published together with the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa and the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape)
Palmberg, M. Afrikabild för partnerskap? Afrika i de svenska skolböckerna (NAI, 2000)
Palmberg, M. (ed.) Encounter Images in the Meetings between Africa and Europe (NAI, 2001)
Kirkegaard, A. and M. Palmberg (eds) Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa (NAI in cooperation with the Dept of Musicology at Åbo Akademi, Finland, 2002)
Palmberg, M. (ed.) What’s culture got to do with it? (NAI, 2010)
CHAPTER 8

Reflections on the five research programmes

Interest in African studies surged in the Nordic countries in the 1970s and 1980s. Many young professionals went to Africa to work as volunteers and in development cooperation agencies. Later, they continued their higher academic studies at universities where postgraduate programmes welcomed research on development, in particular in Africa. Nordic academics also went to African universities as guest researchers and lecturers. The Nordic Africa Institute played an important role in this mobilisation of intellectual interest in African studies and development. Many Nordic academics got their first opportunity to undertake study in an African country through NAI travel grants, while the NAI library provided unique documentary sources and support. The scope of the scholarly interest in Africa can be gauged by the remarkable growth of the number of travel and study grants awarded as shown in the table in chapter 10. Hence, an intellectual infrastructure evolved in the Nordic countries capable of undertaking research on Africa.

This scholarly interest coincided with a difficult period in African history. The euphoria of the early independence years was gone, the oil price shocks undermined the terms of trade for most African countries and popular discontent gave rise to political upheaval, which in turn were met with repressive measures. The Cold War also fuelled authoritarian tendencies, leading to more discontent, strife, coups and civil wars, while the economies of most African countries continued to deteriorate. Nature also seemed to punish Africa. A period of relatively abundant rainfall had prevailed in the decades up to the 1960s. Thereafter, rainfall regimes became more erratic, with recurrent dry spells and droughts afflicting African agriculture, which was overwhelmingly rain-fed.

In this setting, international, national and local development cooperation agencies grappled with development strategies that would alleviate poverty.
In retrospect, one can argue that the research programmes launched by NAI in the 1980s and into the 1990s followed a logical path. The first programme Human Life in Arid Lands was triggered by the environmental disasters that struck Eastern and Southern Africa in the 1980s. There was already a group of Nordic academics (geographers, anthropologists, etc.) who had conducted their early research in East African drylands. Indeed, this competence was well established at NAI itself. The programme thoroughly probed the suffering and adaptation of societies in ecologically marginal regions, and laid bare the contradictions between the approaches and understanding of planners and policy-makers on the one hand and the dynamics and coping mechanisms of local societies on the other. The former wanted to settle pastoralist groups and make them farmers while pastoralists tried to avoid this, since they considered that a sedentary life would grind them into poverty. Arid Lands called attention to political, economic and social factors in environmental change and thereby contributed to the discipline of political ecology.

Arid Lands had a notable impact, not least because several new research and development projects as well as study courses sprang from it. During the programme, research indicated that farmers and herders whose resources were wiped out by drought took refuge in small towns. This was one source of impetus for the next research programme, Urban Development in Rural Context.

While international attention had already begun to turn to urbanism in Africa, the NAI programme approached it from a particular angle – the potential role of small towns in the development of their rural neighbourhoods. The programme set out with the hypothesis that this role could be positive. However, the research soon revealed that in the early 1990s small towns did not provide the dynamism, opportunities and resources to serve as development centres. On the contrary, the research showed that urban physical and social infrastructure was in decline due to cash-strapped budgets and government neglect. In some cases, urban deterioration was so bad that residents had started to move back to the countryside. Urban
Development in Rural Context concluded that macroeconomic and political factors at the national level prevented small towns in the African countries under study from helping rural areas to prosper. This macro-environment was, the researchers concluded, largely determined by structural adjustment policies.

It was, then, logical for NAI to focus the next research programme on *The Political and Social Aspects of Structural Adjustment*. SAP was an organised initiative by the international development community to intervene in African economic management. It was highly controversial and interpreted in some circles as infringing on African state sovereignty. Donors who claimed their aid was given according to the priorities of recipient governments were uneasy at providing funds through SAPs. Several other research programmes analysed the macroeconomic aspects of SAPs. The NAI programme was distinctive in focusing on the socioeconomic processes and on sectoral and local impacts.

A key conclusion of the research on SAPS was that their immediate impact on African societies was negative. They gave rise to decay in health and education services, withdrawal of subsidies, lower salaries and job losses. In short, large sections of the populations of Africa became poorer.

It was thus valid that NAI’s next research programme of this kind homed in on the nature of poverty in African societies. *Poverty and Prosperity* challenged statistical definitions of poverty produced by international organisations that categorised populations into different degrees of poverty according to their economic and nutritional status. Instead, *Poverty and Prosperity* took an anthropological approach and investigated the self-image of those people whom outsiders considered poor, and how they themselves defined poverty.

The programme *Cultural Images* brought to light examples of the vibrant cultural expressions of modern Africa. African artists should not necessarily be seen as representatives of their “culture,” but should primarily be assessed for their individual skills and creativity. The programme gave voice to writers, sculptors, film makers and
other cultural workers from various countries. It also contributed insights into African realities that complement journalistic reports and social science publications.

In short, the research programmes reviewed above identified major trends in African development in the 1980s and 1990s. They also converged in the sense that the basic problematique in one programme gave rise to offshoots that were explored in the next. The programmes helped deepen the understanding of the nature and consequences of the issues at hand. Research at NAI mobilised hundreds of Nordic and African scholars, most of them in their early careers. The majority of them continued to work with development problems and prospects in Africa in their subsequent careers as scholars, university teachers, NGO staff, policy-makers and officials in national and international development cooperation agencies.

The research publications associated with the programmes were extensively read. It was NAI’s publishing policy to distribute free of charge copies of the books and research reports to university libraries and research institutions in Africa, the Nordic countries and internationally. On average 1,200 copies of each book were printed. As mentioned earlier, the publications were widely reviewed in professional journals and most reviews were positive. Less favourable comments related to the sometimes unsatisfactory editing of the anthologies and the frequent spelling errors and absence of references. However, the upside of this was the short time-lag (in several cases less than a year) between conference and publication, as a result of which research findings could reach the readership while they were still up-to-date.

The scholars involved in the research conducted under NAI’s auspices deserve respect for their commitment and professionalism. Their engagement with Africa is readily apparent in their books and reports. Afro-pessimism and donor-fatigue then prevailed in international diplomatic and aid forums. However, the mainly young researchers involved in the NAI programmes did not shy away from the problems, but probed below the surface of the African crises as they
were reported in the media to investigate the structures and processes holding Africa’s people back and to explore constructive solutions.

Summing up, the organisation of research into coherent programmes gave NAI a high profile within the international scholarly community and helped ensure that research at the institute was relevant to different constituencies and achieved a reputable standard. Moreover, the programmes provided venues for increased contact between Nordic and African scholars and between them and the international research community. In this way, NAI definitely filled a gap.

The research topics chosen in the 1980s and 1990s are still highly relevant. Great strides have been made in environmental conservation and the emphasis is now on approaches that involve local inhabitants and combine protection and resource use. New challenges have arisen. Changes in weather patterns are being observed. All over Africa, extreme weather events (heat-waves, torrential rain, long droughts) have become commonplace and the onset of rainy seasons fluctuates more than before. These changes make rain-fed agriculture and animal husbandry ever more vulnerable. Moreover, the breakdown of political order in parts of the Horn of Africa has placed many of the pastoralist areas beyond the reach of any development initiative.

Environmental refugees continue to flock into small and large African towns. Providing services and security to urban residents is as challenging as ever.

Structural adjustment has been implemented. State monopolies have been abolished, the private sector has expanded and currencies are floating. A number of African countries have experienced rapid economic growth in recent years. However, the socioeconomic predicament of the ordinary people highlighted by the NAI research programmes is still an issue.

Lastly, poverty is still rampant in Africa. Even in the fast growing economies, levels of mass poverty remain where they were ten years ago, and in some countries poverty is increasing. How to rid Africa of poverty is still a major political question, and poverty alleviation
programmes need to be underpinned by research.

The research on cultural issues has supplemented social science studies and media reports as sources of knowledge about Africa. It has broadened the image of Africa by illuminating the rich cultural expressions in contemporary African literature and arts.
Continuity and change – NAI research in the new millennium

CHAPTER 9

A widely expanded research agenda

As the five programmes described in the previous chapters unfolded and reached completion, new research efforts were born at NAI. Projects undertaken by individual research fellows at the institute abounded and new collective efforts were initiated.

The main joint programmes and projects conducted in parallel with or as follow-ups to the five ones already reviewed are outlined below.

The Southern Africa Programme conducted from 1988 to 1998 was a joint initiative with SIDA. Its purpose was to provide research-based information about Southern Africa to the Nordic countries. This was achieved by promoting contacts between researchers in the Nordic and Southern African countries, including organising international seminars and by encouraging and publishing studies on topics relevant to future Nordic development assistance to Southern Africa. In particular, the programme focused on the effects of international sanctions against the apartheid regime and on political and economic changes in South Africa and their regional impact, including long-term post-apartheid Nordic cooperation with countries in Southern Africa. The programme was coordinated by Bertil Odén (Sweden).
A major documentation and research project on *National Liberation in Southern Africa: The Role of the Nordic Countries* was initiated in 1994 and completed in 2001. It was financed by the governments of the Nordic countries and coordinated by Tor Sellström (Sweden). The purpose was to record the involvement of the Nordic countries in the liberation struggles of Southern Africa, specifically those in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, as well as in Guinea-Bissau. The project had research teams in all Nordic countries except Iceland.

Moreover, the project analysed the social, economic and political background to Nordic involvement and the role played by Nordic countries in the international politics associated with the liberation struggles. The period under study was 1950-94. Archival sources were identified, many of which had been confidential and not available for research, and inventoried. Included among the documents and research materials were primary source materials in government and NGO archives, as well as interviews with key individuals. The project team sifted through close to one million pages of official documentation on Nordic humanitarian assistance to Southern Africa.

The findings were presented at a high level conference in 1999 in Cape Town entitled “Nordic Solidarity with the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa and Challenges for Democratic Partnerships into the 21st Century” jointly organised by NAI, the Robben Island Museum and the Mayibuye Institute at the University of the Western Cape. Five books, based on this primary material, were published between 1999 and 2001. They describe and analyse relations between the liberation movements and Nordic authorities and NGOs, and provide rich documentation for further research at universities in the Nordic countries and in the countries of Southern Africa.

The publications included:

The research project Aid Effectiveness was conducted from 1994 to 2000 in collaboration with the Department of Peace and Development Research at Göteborg University and coordinated by Dr Jerker Carlsson (Sweden). The project had three components. First, the aid programmes for poverty reduction instituted by nine EU countries were examined. The second component was an in-depth analysis of several aid projects financed by Nordic development cooperation agencies. A key focus was their actual impact on the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable groups in the project areas. Improved methodologies for aid-impact investigations also emerged from these studies. The third component sought to establish a solid academic basis for theories and methodologies used to evaluate development aid programmes. Through this project, NAI established collaboration with several European and African research institutes. The project resulted in several books, both monographs and collected works.

Gender Research on Urbanisation, Planning, Housing and Everyday Life (GRUPHEL), was related to Small Towns. It focused on one of the important earlier findings, namely the circumstances of women migrants to towns. GRUPHEL was coordinated by Dr Ann Schlyter (Sweden) and established as a research network based at the University of Lund, but with links to NAI. It ran from 1994 to 1997. Its starting point was the realisation that gender issues, especially the situation of women, had been seriously neglected in urban research.
in Africa. Gender relations were analysed as part and parcel of power relations in society. The programme studied the rapid changes in gender relations during the process of urbanisation in Africa, concentrating particularly on poor women’s access to housing, public services, land and business options, and on changing social roles. Its geographical focus was the urban areas of Southern Africa. A special case study conducted in Zambia analysed how first-generation shanty-town dwellers looked on gender and power relations. A network of Nordic and African researchers was created. A number of seminars were held and resulted in several books, among them:

- Sithole-Fundire, S. et al. (eds) *Gender Research on Urbanization, Planning, Housing and Everyday Life* (ZWRCN and NAI, 1995)

GRUPHEL had an explicit policy-making orientation, its target audience being urban planners, policy-makers and aid agencies involved in formulating sustainable urban housing policies. It was followed up in 1998 by a fully “Africanised” phase coordinated by the National University of Lesotho. During this phase, GRUPHEL carried out and published case studies from eight countries in Southern Africa.

Another follow-on to *Small Towns* was the research programme *Cities, Governance and Civil Society in Africa*, conducted at NAI between 1997 and 2002, with Mariken Vaa (Norway) as coordinator. It addressed the issue of extra-legal informality in relation to shelter and income generation in the context of urban development, governance and citizen action. The themes included extra-legal housing and unregistered economic activities, and voluntary urban associations and their advocacy of collective action for urban development. The programme researched and documented the crises in large Afri-
can urban centres and how citizens, associations and authorities responded to them. Several conferences were held, among them “The formal and the informal city – what happens at the interface?” held in Copenhagen in 2000.

The conferences resulted in the following books:
- Tranberg Hansen, K. and M. Vaa (eds) *Reconsidering Informality; Perspectives from Urban Africa* (NAI, 2004)

The programme *Sexuality, Gender and Society* was conducted between 2000 and 2007 and coordinated by Signe Arnfred (Denmark). Its aim was to develop and support critical discussion of sexuality and gender in Africa and elsewhere in the context of feminist theorising and debate. Focal themes changed over the years, starting with investigation of ways of thinking and writing about sexuality in Africa and moving on to comparative African/Nordic perspectives on motherhood and to a focus on masculinity in Africa. Sexual harassment and same-sexuality were also study themes. An important activity was the publication of research results and lines of thinking and their dissemination among African feminists and gender researchers. The programme developed a wide network of researchers addressing these topics. An e-mail list with some 300 members was invaluable for the debates and for research promotion. During the programme, four conferences and a number of workshops and panel debates took place. Among the many publications arising from the programme was *Rethinking Sexualities in Africa* (NAI, 2006), edited by the programme coordinator and published in three editions. Another book generated by the programme - Arnfred, S. *Sexuality and Gender Politics in Mozambique. Rethinking Gender in Africa* (James Currey & NAI, 2011) - received the KRAKA price by the Danish association for gender research in 2012.

The research programme *Liberation and Democracy in Southern Africa* (LiDeSA) was conducted 2001-2006. It continued NAI’s
focus on national liberation in Southern Africa. LiDeSA investigated the relationship between the anticolonial movements in the region (at the demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa), national self-determination and the establishment of democratic systems. The coordinator was Henning Melber (Namibia), then research director at NAI. Empirical studies were conducted focusing on political, sociological and socio-economic issues in a comparative regional perspective. Major case studies were Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, investigating the scope and limitations of former liberation movements as governments. Conferences, seminars, panel debates and lectures were arranged in collaboration with counterparts in the region. Many researchers from a variety of organizations, most of them in Southern Africa, were participating in the network.

The major findings from the programme were that the armed struggle against settler colonial rule limited the emancipatory potential once resistance turned into political power. The dominant mindset of the ‘liberators’ as well as the concepts of power and control displayed the limits to liberation.

An external evaluation of LiDeSA was conducted in late 2005. It was positive both regarding scientific quality and relevance, concluding that the combination of rigorous academic analysis and a commitment to public discourse has made LiDeSA highly relevant for a wider audience, and the network participants did not shy away from controversies and critical engagement with the ruling circles in the countries in question. Through the programme more than 20 reports, book chapters and anthologies were published. Two of the major publications were considered pioneering and received international acclaim namely Melber, H. (ed.) Limits to liberation in Southern Africa: The unfinished business of democratic consolidation (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, 2003) and Melber, H. (ed.) Re-examining liberation in Namibia: Political culture since independence (NAI, 2003).

Gender and Age in African Cities (2003-09) focused on another research perspective arising from NAI’s long-term focus on urbanisa-
tion. Coordinated by Amin Kamete (Zimbabwe), the programme studied African cities from the perspective of their stakeholders. The key areas were urban dynamics, household transformation, gender, ageing and youth. The programme argued that ageing in Africa is an issue that cannot be deferred. Rather, it needs immediate attention, as do the problems of a growing youth population. Two conferences were held, one in Iceland and the other in Malawi.

*Post-Conflict Transition, the State and Civil Society* was conducted from 2005 to 2011. Coordinated by Cyril Obi (Nigeria), it built on an earlier shorter project (2001-03) on the same topic coordinated by Ebrima Sall (Gambia). The project evaluated, debated and interrogated the transitions from conflict to post-conflict in a number of West African countries. On the basis of the research findings the project sought to come up with concrete suggestions for the consolidation of democracy, justice and peace in the region. A key focus was multiparty elections and their impact on peace-building in the region. Also included was a study of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Through the project a substantial amount of articles, book chapters and reports were published. Several workshops and conferences were arranged. A high level conference on post-conflict elections in West Africa was held in Accra in 2006. It resulted in a report edited by Carin Norberg and Cyril Obi “Reconciling Winners and Losers in Post-Conflict Elections in West Africa”. Additional results of the project were published as a special issue of CODESRIA’s *African Journal of International Affairs* 2007.

The *Political Economies of Displacement in Southern Africa* (2006-10) programme was coordinated by Amanda Hammar (Zimbabwe). Wars, political violence and environmental stress have produced large numbers of forcibly displaced people in Africa. Adopting a regional Southern African approach, the programme focused on the generation of forced displacement, the dynamics this creates and the transformative effects it can have. The programme went beyond documenting violence and the victimisation of subjected populations by exploring the actors, their motives and the political and economic
problems and opportunities generated. The results were summarised in a special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* 2010.

**NAI internationally recognised**

It is evident from the glimpses given above that NAI pursued and hosted a broad portfolio of research initiatives starting from the mid-1980s. These programmes, although thematically varied, followed the common administrative procedures that had gradually developed at NAI. Interested researchers in Nordic and African countries were mobilised and formed networks. The research theme of the programme was elaborated in an exploratory workshop, after which researchers were selected for specific investigations. Fieldwork and desk studies were then undertaken, followed by one or more workshops or conferences. Findings were subsequently published in an anthology or as articles or research reports either by NAI or other publishers.

The shift from individual research support to coordinating coherent multi-disciplinary programmes involving several researchers and sub-topics helped put NAI on the international map: it had joined the ranks of those institutions providing innovative and timely research-based information about development issues in Africa. NAI became internationally known as a centre where research, documentation, publishing and networking supported each other and created synergies. Through these endeavours, NAI contributed to capacity-strengthening among young academics in the Nordic countries and in Africa by providing opportunities for field research (travel grants) and an academic platform for communicating and discussing research findings. NAI has thus played a catalytic role as a centre for supporting and encouraging social science research on Africa.

**Research quality and relevance**

The external evaluations of NAI (most recently in 1997, 2006 and
have focused on organisation, administration and management; the Nordic dimension; cost-effectiveness; and the relevance of the activities to different target groups. It is in the context of the other main activities (library and publications) that the research dimension has been considered. Evaluators have commented on the quality of individual research outputs. However, a full-scale scientific evaluation of the research activities has yet to be conducted.

In earlier chapters, evaluators’ views on the scientific quality of selected published works in the five research programmes have been given and book reviews have been quoted. To recapitulate: some monographs and book chapters have been adjudged path-breaking, innovative and excellent from a scientific point of view. The majority of published research outputs have been ranked as good, while a minority has been considered of medium to low quality, being descriptive and repetitive of already published works.

As to informativeness, NAI’s publications are generally commended for their up-to-date accounts and analyses of the development issues under study. This, in combination with the relatively short time lag between writing and publication, has been appreciated by readership.

A recurrent question has been the development relevance of research at NAI. The general evaluations noted above provide contradictory answers, depending on who is asked. In a restricted sense (applicability to development projects) the relevance has generally been considered limited by officials at Nordic development cooperation agencies and embassies in African countries. However, a narrow definition of this sort is applicable to consultancy reports, not to academic institutions. In a wider sense, the development relevance of NAI’s research is quite impressive. The research findings the institute has generated have raised the awareness of and knowledge in Nordic countries of Africa’s history and diversity as well as the current pro-

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gress in and problems of different countries on the continent. This has been achieved through travel and study grants, seminars, contributions to public debates, through the wide circulation of the institute’s publications and the accessibility of its library. In Africa itself, the involvement of young African researchers in NAI’s research programmes has contributed to their subsequent careers as scholars, research leaders, policy-makers, planners and executives in African development programmes.

In the first decade of this century policy relevance has come to the fore at NAI. The scope of NAI’s agenda was broadened in 2005 to include policy-related activities not only as an additional line of work but as a formal division alongside research, publications, library and administration. Consequently, all researchers attached to the institute are expected to contribute to the series of policy-oriented briefings intended for the attention of decision-makers, the interested public as well as other researchers.
CHAPTER 10

The legacy today

Research initiatives mushroomed at NAI in the first decade of this century. By the middle of the decade, the scale and volume of research was extensive.

The year 2006 can be taken as an example. Ten research programmes and long-term research projects were under way and were coordinated by research leaders affiliated to and financed by NAI or from external sources. Thirty-two study grants were awarded to Nordic scholars to enable them to work in the institute’s library for one month, while 40 young scholars were awarded travel grants for field research in Africa. NAI hosted eight guest researchers (Nordic and African) for a period of a few weeks to a few months. During the year, 12 conferences and workshops were held with more than 300 participants. NAI published 11 books, research reports and discussion papers. In addition, NAI research staff published more than 40 articles and book chapters in journals and books produced by other publishers. New library acquisitions amounted to 2,150 volumes (the total holdings comprising 60,000 volumes and 500 printed periodicals), while book loans amounted to 15,000. Visitors to NAI’s website downloaded more than 30,000 publications. The library received the prestigious Library of the Year award at the Swedish Book Fair in Gothenburg in 2006.

Since the start in 1962 the volume of activities has continued to increase as illustrated in the table on the next page.
Growth of research-related activities at NAI

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New research structure

In the beginning of the new millennium it was realised that the research coordination mechanisms of the 1980s were no longer adequate to cope with the growing volume of activities. A new organisational structure was needed. A new position as Research Director was created. In 2007, NAI’s research was regrouped into clusters. This move was intended to enhance coherence and integration among the multitude of research efforts and to promote interdisciplinary inquiries through collaborative ventures. Another purpose was relating research topics more closely to areas of interest in Nordic development policy.

The clusters are:

- **Rural and Agrarian Change, Property and Resources**
- **Urban Dynamics**
- **Conflict, Security and Democratic Transformation**
- **Globalisation, Trade and Regional Integration**

Each cluster functions as a platform for the exploration of conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of Africa, for the dissemination of empirically grounded research and for public debate and policy dialogue. Every cluster includes a number of sub-themes.

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3 Of which 90% from African countries.
The research agenda in each cluster is multidisciplinary and addresses issues within the social sciences highly relevant to current African circumstances. Activities are coordinated by a cluster leader and the team may include five to ten researchers, some of them part-time.

In 2010 each cluster developed a multi-year strategic research plan, focusing on a limited number of sub-themes. The research plans were based on inception seminars during which reviews of the state of the given field were done, and emerging themes were identified that NAI should concentrate on in the coming years. The cluster strategic plans form the basis for launching new research project; recruiting new researchers with appropriate competence complementing the required field; as well as mobilizing external resources.

In conjunction with the reorganisation of research, NAI also changed its publishing policy. As of 2009, in-house publishing has been concentrated on information of a policy character (Policy Notes; Current African Issues; Policy Dialogue, and Discussion Papers). Research articles written by NAI’s research staff are submitted for publication by established scholarly journals, while monograph manuscripts are sent to commercial publishers. In this way, the research output is subjected to external peer-review.

The volume of current research is impressive. All told, in 2011 there were 37 researchers active at the institute (including guest researchers and others who had their main employment elsewhere) while the four clusters hosted 22 on-going research projects. The cluster leaders and project coordinators are based at NAI, while the associated researchers are spread across a wide range of institutions.

Current research is geared to the development issues of the coming decade. Nevertheless, several common threads run through NAI’s research from the early programmes of the 1980s and 1990s to the projects undertaken within today’s clusters. This is logical, as many of the development problems capturing the attention of the scholarly development community in past decades remain unresolved.

*Rural and Agrarian Change* pursues studies related to pastoralists, resource management, livelihoods and land use conflicts in pre-
sent-day Eastern and Southern Africa. It has also built on the legacy of political ecology from earlier research by bringing to light and addressing new issues such as intellectual property rights to genetic resources, agricultural technology, production of biofuels as well as large-scale land acquisitions for commercial agriculture.

NAI continues to monitor the most significant transformation taking place in Africa, namely urbanisation. The Urban Dynamics cluster has moved beyond “small towns” and now examines multiple processes, including urban governance and politics, infrastructure and services, planning, urban informality and urban modernities.

In the Conflict, Security and Democratic Transformation cluster, one can find traces of earlier research as well as new avenues of study. Within the cluster, investigations continue into conflicts arising from disputes over land rights, citizenship and identities. Other key issues are how societies can be rebuilt after civil war; how they can get back on the path towards peace and democracy; and the role of African regional organisations in conflict management.

Certain of the themes in Globalisation, Trade and Regional Integration can be traced back to the earlier regional studies on Southern Africa. However, the cluster mainly addresses new topics, such as African responses to globalisation, migration and diasporas, African regional cooperation, the problems and opportunities arising from African encounters with China, India and Brazil, as well as the role of the African intelligentsia in the global knowledge society.

NAI has consciously opted not to mount specific projects on poverty and on gender, on the grounds that these subjects should permeate all research projects.

Looking forward
Today, NAI nurtures a rich tradition of research, documentation and networking. The institute is internationally respected and sought after, as witness its hosting in 2011 of the 4th European Conference on African Studies on behalf of AEGIS Africa Studies in Europe. The conference brought together more than 1,000 scholars from 70 coun-
tries, including a large number representing African institutions.

Africa is a quite different place today from what it was in the mid-1980s when NAI planned its first research programmes. The continent-wide recession has given way to high, though uneven, levels of economic growth. Over the past decade, sub-Saharan Africa has made remarkable progress, with GDP growth averaging around 6 per cent annually from 2006 to 2011. Some countries have achieved close to double digit growth for several consecutive years.

Africa’s current place in the world reflects this change. Dependence on former Western colonial powers is generally diminished as African countries forge alliances with the Asian and Latin American regions. Africa is nowadays firmly connected to the global scene. Fibre-optic network systems penetrate the hitherto underserved African countries. Broadband connectivity spurs economic growth and gives professionals, institutions, NGOs and even small-scale farmers access to information.

Universities proliferate across the continent. Tens of thousands of young Africans are enrolled in postgraduate training programmes in their home countries and at regional centres of excellence, where they have opportunities to conduct advanced research in state-of-the-art scientific laboratories.

In celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2012, the Nordic Africa Institute carries forward a legacy of research, documentation and publication on current African issues. The institute can lay claim to solid experience in mobilising young academics to engage in forward-looking research on topics and themes that are relevant to development discourse in and about Africa.

The new leadership of the institute from 2013 will have the challenging task of creating new synergies between research, documentation, publishing and policy-briefing. NAI’s agenda will continue to include the lingering development issues that were in the forefront in the 1990s, while at the same time expanding the scope of engagement with Africa as an emerging force in the global setting of the coming decade.
## APPENDIX:

Researchers at the Nordic Africa Institute (in alphabetic order)

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<th>Country (Ethnicity)</th>
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APPENDIX:
Acronyms

AEGIS  Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies
CDR  Centre for Development Research
CODESRIA  Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
DANIDA  Danish International Development Agency
ECAS  European Conference on African Studies
HABITAT  United Nations Human Settlements Programme
IGAD  Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IIED  International Institute for Environment and Development
IMF  International Monetary Fund
LiDeSA  Liberation and Democracy in Southern Africa
LSE  London School of Economics and Political Science
NAI  Nordic Africa Institute
NGO  Non-Governmental Organization
NORAD  Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OSSREA  Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
SAP  Structural Adjustment Programme
SAPES  Southern African Political Economy Series
SAREC  Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries
SIAS  Scandinavian Institute of African Studies
SIDA  Swedish International Development Authority (until 199)
Sida  Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (as of 1995)
UNEP  United Nations Environment Programme
UN-HABITAT  United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNRISD  United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
ZWRCN  Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network
The Nordic Africa Institute started on a modest scale back in 1962 by awarding three travel grants to young Nordic scholars with an interest in Africa.

Fifty years later, the institute has become an internationally renowned centre of research, documentation, publishing and networking.

By coordinating coherent programmes spanning multiple researchers and several sub-topics NAI has helped to strengthen capacity among young academics in Nordic countries by providing travel grants for field research and an academic platform for communicating and discussing research findings. NAI has thus been a key catalyst in social science research on Africa.

In this publication, Michael Ståhl contextualises, reviews and reflects on five innovative research programmes undertaken at NAI from the late 1980s into the 1990s. Through these thematic, collaborative programmes, NAI complemented its already established support for individual academic projects. In order to place the five programmes in larger context, brief accounts of the earlier research support provided by NAI are given as is an overview of the subsequent research profile and administration of NAI up to 2012.

Michael Ståhl has had a lifelong academic and professional career in development issues. His research experience has been in rural development in Africa. He has held senior positions at universities and in the Swedish development cooperation community. From 2002 to 2010, he was the director of the International Foundation for Science.