

Poverty measurement blues

Understanding structural poverty

Key issue

- What is the scope for bringing a structural analysis of poverty into the mainstream of chronic poverty studies?
- Structural poverty
 - Looking beyond the attributes of individuals and households
 - At how they are situated in society (by access to resources, power relations)
 - And at how core social processes differentially impact different groups

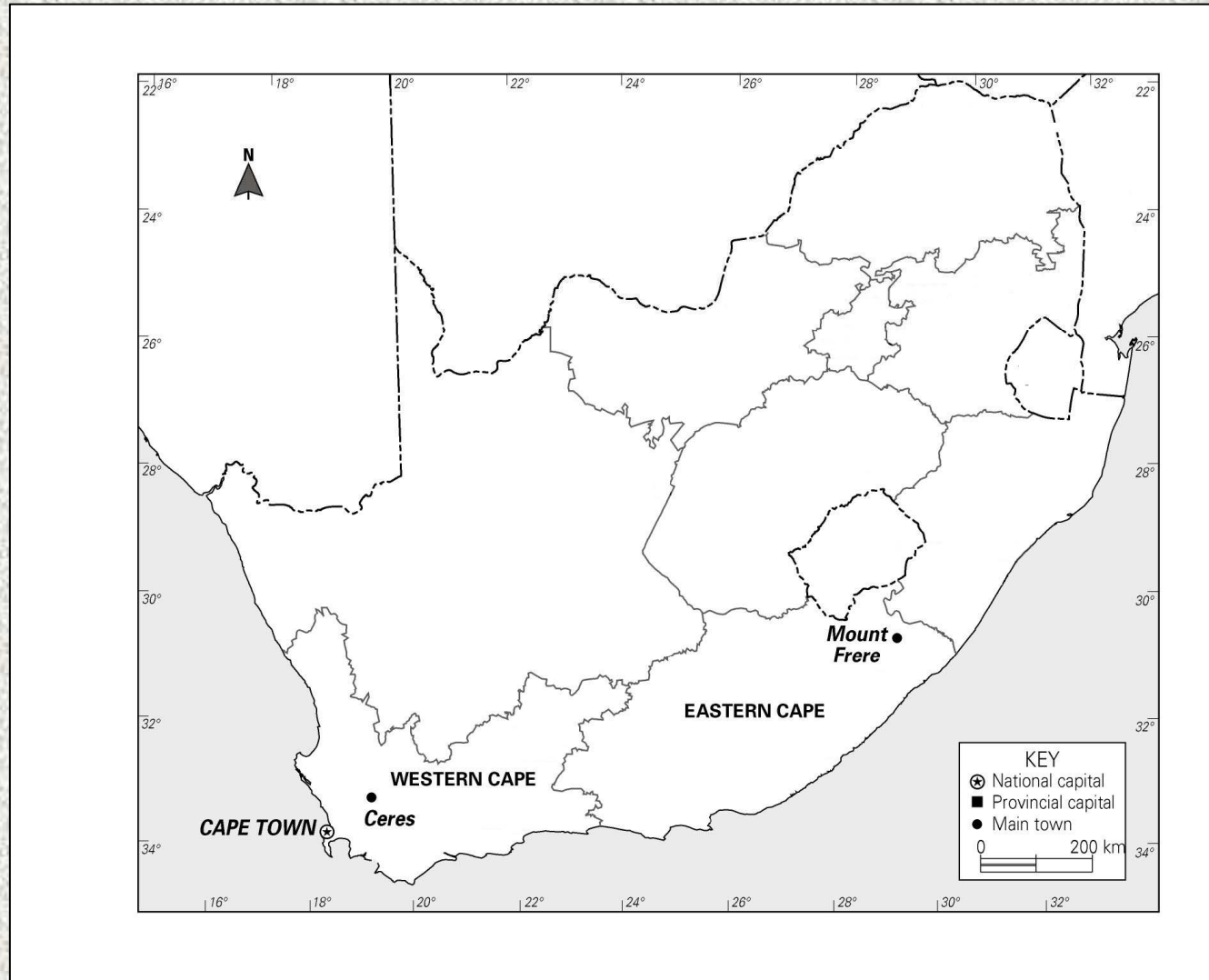
Defining chronic poverty

- Ambiguity in 'chronic poverty' discourse
- Policy/political discourse
- Its operationalization in econometric analyses
 - Defining it in terms of how it is measured
 - Focussing on duration rather than process
 - Collapsing indicator (monetary, capability) into the thing it indicates
 - Leads to socially dislocated analyses
 - Identification of 'the chronic poor' only nebulously helps identify structurally poor groups
 - Trivialises analysis of chronic poverty, directs attention away from underlying structural dynamics\
- Don't confuse measurement with definition!

Grasping structural poverty

- Carter, Barrett, May – valuable corrective to ‘structure blindness’
 - Brings in some measure of focus on causal terrain
 - But still blind to social relations
 - Which mediate ability to use capitals in the first place
 - Methodological individualism ignores inter and intra household relations
 - Du Toit & Neves 2006 – Vulnerability is fundamentally shaped by insertion into social relations (especially spatially extended kinship networks, care chains, practices of reciprocal exchange); ‘social capital’ cannot be understood without them
 - Longer-term (life course poverty) shaped by how people are situated in political economy of changing South Africa

PLAAS / CPRC work in SA



Andries du Toit, October 2006

Three structural contexts

- Ceres: political economy of export agriculture
 - Restructuring of labour relations by commercial operations under pressure from labour market re-regulation and buyer driven commodity chains
 - Those ‘thrown off’ farms, those excluded from patron-client relations through racial identity
- Eastern Cape: adverse incorporation into monetized economy
 - De-agrarianization; penetration of rural economy by (extractive) lead firms; collapse of labour intensive mining and textile industries
 - Young people lacking resources to migrate; women bearing brunt of ‘care deficit’
- Khayelitsha: geopolitics of race and space
 - Persistence of Apartheid spatial geography; Cape Town chooses ‘global city’ growth path; crowding-out of informal sector
 - Those excluded from formal employment and marginalised by patriarchal power relations in kinship networks

Policy relevance... and relevant policies

- Are 'structural' analyses doomed to 'live on the margins'?
 - Cf 'Normal policy' (Kanbur) and 'poverty knowledge industry' (O'Connor)
- Addison & Hulme: 'In the view of the measurement camp(sic) structuralism is largely ignored by the dominant policy paradigm not because it raises (uncomfortable) questions about political power but rather because its methodology yields little in the way of realistic policy recommendations'
- Au contraire
 - Chronic poverty analysis can benefit from a more located, historically rooted understanding
 - ignoring structural issues leads to inappropriate policies based on mistaken analyses
 - Agro-export: privatization policy, labour market regulation; BEE
 - Eastern Cape: under-investment in smallholder agriculture
 - Khayelitsha: pro-poor urban planning
 - All three contexts: broadening social protection,
- Poverty studies should be aware of (but not constrained by) changing winds of donor / government fashion
- Biggest threat to intellectual vigour of poverty studies: retreat into narrow specialism, smugness, and political safety