

# Editorial

Scenario planners at the highest levels of government start with the baseline that poverty and inequality levels have not decreased meaningfully since 1994, and are unlikely to do so with our current economic policies. Of course, official public statements don't usually acknowledge this reality. Rather, there is some vague talk that "life is getting better", which in several respects, mainly procedural, it is. But it is not getting better in terms of poverty outcomes.

Mass poverty is taking a substantial toll on the country. Twenty five percent of all live births in 1999 were into households in extreme destitution. Such adverse circumstances increase the child's chances of disability and illness, poor education, suffering violence and abuse, unemployment and so on. Poverty induces behaviour that increases vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Poverty and inequality are heavily correlated to property and violent crimes. Finally, the investment study for the Office of the President highlighted that our levels of mass poverty represent a major constraint to investment, as investors regard the situation as unsustainable.

However, the politics of the debate stymies any evidence-based debate about 'what is to be done?'. Not surprisingly, very few are prepared to own up to having made mistakes and taking the political flak for that. South Africa waits either for a second miracle or, more realistically, for a policy shift to be introduced through the 'back door'.

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