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Poverty leaps in South Africa

Zabalaza

August 2002

African working class people are worse off than ever, new study shows.

The recent All Media and Products Survey (AMPS) found that the number of people living below the poverty line was grown rapidly in the last 10 years. In 1989, 51 percent of African people earned an income below the poverty line. By 2001, the figure had leapt to 62 percent of African people, 13 million adults.

Amongst Coloureds, the proportion of people below the poverty line grew from 24 percent in 1989 to 29 percent; amongst Indians, from 6 percent to 11 percent; and among Whites, from 3 percent to 4 percent.

At the same time, however, the African middle class grew rapidly. By 2001, roughly one million African adults earned R8000 or more per month. This is roughly a quarter of the high income group, up from just over an eighth (or 16 percent) in 1997. The remainder of the high income group is made up of Coloureds, Indians and Whites.

At the same time, the government has pushed forward relentlessly with its programme of cutting off services to those who cannot afford them.

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Retrieved on 11th August 2021 from zabalaza.net
Published in *Zabalaza* #3.

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Research by the Municipal Services Project and the Human Sciences Research Council shows that nearly 10 million people (almost a quarter of the country) have been cut off from water and electricity because they could not pay their bills. Two million people have been thrown out of their homes for the same reason.

THE REASON? MASS POVERTY

Government cut-offs and evictions will not make people pay up money that they do not have.

The anti-poor policies of the government are sowing the seeds of a social upheaval the likes of which South Africa has never seen.