



SUMMARY

POBRESA, BAN ATAK'É (let's attack poverty)

The report *Pobresa, ban atak'é* as presented in 1999 by Reda Sosial describes the results of a participatory research into the poverty situation of at-risk groups and problem groups in several deprived neighbourhoods on Curacao, the Netherlands Antilles.

The first chapter describes the motive, purpose and methodology. At the beginning of 1998, Reda Sosial established that after having functioned for more than a year in which a wide assortment of interventions had been performed on the five islands, the problems of the weaker groups had increased drastically as a consequence of the effects of the current financial restructuring. The existing public systems of providing service to the weaker ones and significant parts of the private enterprise did not succeed in stopping the negative developments, let alone in changing them into the direction of improvement. Furthermore, Reda Sosial discovered an increasing erosion of confidence among the weakest groups with regard to the capacity and will of the Government and private enterprise to bring about a change in the situation.

That is why Reda Sosial wanted to develop a renewed plan of action to "combat poverty". Prof. Dr. D. Kruijt of the University of Utrecht and drs. G. Oude Engberink of the Social Services Department in Rotterdam were requested to draw up Terms of Reference (TOR) for a research on combating poverty. An Advisory Commission was appointed by the Executive Council of the Island Territory of Curacao at the request of Reda Sosial, which commission was directed to act as a sounding board for the central research team.

The purpose of the research was to arrive at a better understanding of the nature, the distribution and the dynamics of poverty in the Netherlands Antilles, the survival strategies of the poor, their necessities, ambitions and visions with regard to possible solutions (starting on Curacao) in order to work out programs/policy on the basis of this which could contribute effectively and efficiently in the short, middle and long terms to the combating of the established problems in the poor districts in the Netherlands Antilles.

The research is based on a strategic case-study executed in four marginalized districts on Curacao: Soto, Kanga/Dein, Seru Grandi and Berg Altena. The study consisted of three different questionnaires:

- semi-structured (quantitative) questionnaires to be presented to 60 key figures (15 per district);
- structured (quantitative) questionnaires for 160 heads of households (40 per district);
- nine open-end (qualitative) questionnaires (one per target group).

The semi-structured questionnaire was drawn up for key informers from the research districts, such as Board members of the districts, a headmaster, a policeman, a pastor/priest, a social worker, etc. The questionnaire consisted of both yes-or-no and open-end questions on the situation in the district, the most important developments taking place there, their positive and negative aspects, housing, health aspects, education, economic and social aspects, poverty, infrastructure, migration, religion, recreation and district organizations. The key informers were appointed by the contact in the district.



The structured questionnaire was compiled on the basis of a number of research factors and variables defined by the research team, and was subsequently presented to the CBS for advice. The selection of 160 households took place in an arbitrary manner on the basis of the address file per zone from the CBS files. With the help of the collected quantitative material, a profile of each district was made.

497 persons belonging to one or more of nine defined target groups were interviewed. These target groups are: (1) unemployed/persons on welfare, (2) people working in the informal sector, (3) people with housing problems, (4) women at the head of single-parent families, (5) elderly people, (6) drop-outs (young people who leave school without a diploma) (7) teenage mothers, (8) immigrants, (9) drug addicts and alcoholics. Nine qualitative questionnaires (one per target group) were drawn according to a fixed pattern. They all consist of a fixed framework of questions, supplemented with a few questions that are specifically directed at the target group in question.

The second chapter gives insight into the effects of the policy of the Island Government (Curacao) through the services and the Central Government (the Netherlands Antilles) through the departments. Also the role of funds, banks, non-governmental organisations in the process of fighting poverty are described. One of the conclusions is that both the Island and Central Government lack a structural coordination of the field. There is no integral approach of the matter. Furthermore, there is not enough information available on the different target groups. This makes it difficult to reach the target groups and to design effective policies. Non-governmental organisations and institutions involved in fighting poverty can only operate on the short-term because of the lack of structural fundings.

In chapter three the results of a literature study on poverty on Curacao is presented. It also describes the poverty situation in the aforementioned districts. Some of the findings are that:

- People feel insecure about their income and unemployment is high. More than half of the respondents is unemployed (especially in Soto) and more than half of the respondents receive less than Naf. 500 (USD 270) a month, of these two-third receive income from welfare (especially in Soto).
- The amount of drop-outs is very high. A lot of young people lack the motivation (and often lack of parental guidance) to learn and leave school without a diploma. The rate of functional analphabetism is also high.
- Fortunately the social network which plays an important part of the survival mechanism, is still present.
- The respondents are not satisfied with the infrastructure especially the quality of the roads and poor street lighting.
- The respondents worry about rising criminality and drug abuse. It creates a sense of insecurity in the district.
- Although the people worry more, at the same time they seem more and more apathetic. They simply put up with their present situation.

Chapter four reflects the thoughts of the inhabitants on the situation in their district. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents evaluate the present social-economic situation on Curacao as bad to very bad. They feel that politics are not addressing the problems as it should, costs of living are rising, while income from welfare is too low to pay for these costs of living. They think the biggest problems are criminality, drugs and unemployment. The majority thinks the situation on Curacao was better ten years ago. It seems the respondents just wait for something to change, fifty-six percent is not able to come up with a solution for the social problems. They have grown accustomed to their situation. The respondents who



do have ideas about solutions, mention the importance of stimulating employment, creating a safer environment/district, (vocational) training and education, raising income from welfare, more (payable) housing, better district facilities and more reception facilities for drug addicts. According to the respondents these aspects do not get enough attention. On a scale of 1-10 the respondents value their present-day life with an average of 4.8. Sixty-six percent of the respondents is not very positive about the future. Unless the abovementioned problems are addressed, these expectations will not change for the better. Contrary to these negative future expectations, the respondents hope that in five years they value their life with an average 6.8.

Eighteen percent of the respondents thinks of emigrating within one year (especially to the Netherlands) to pursue a better future.

After the questionnaires the district leaders and inhabitants were asked to participate in two workshops. The idea was to give the inhabitants the possibility to think about possible solutions together and reflect ideas to improve the liveability in their own district, and thus enlarge the commitment to attack the problems together.

The fifth chapter consists of recommendations which are based on the research results, interviews and the information from the workshops. It is evidently clear that to reach an adequate poverty reduction policy and program, governmental services and departments, private funds and foundations should cooperate more and share information and integrate their policies. In order to address the needs of the inhabitants of the districts, efforts should be directed towards stimulating employment and improve the liveability of the neighbourhood. The recommendations are combined into one program by Reda Sosial. Reda Sosial has the intention to execute this program in the four pilot-districts starting 2000 for a period of three years.

REDA SOSIAL, *Pobresa ban atak'é: een sociaal-economische diagnose van de armoede op Curaçao (Willemstad/Amsterdam 1999).*

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