

Integration must be approached with reference to difference, ... class, race, gender and other differences are always interlocked and entangled



SCHOOL INTEGRATION

By Carolyn McKinney and Linda Chisholm

Local and international perspectives

How integrated have our schools really become? This was one of the questions raised at the Colloquium on School Integration hosted by the HSRC this past October in Muldersdrift.

For many, the assumption has been that desegregated schooling might create a racially integrated society or, conversely, that the opening of schools would necessarily lead to integration. However, as Dr Naledi Pandor remarked in her keynote address, when South African schools opened their doors to learners of all races in 1991, nobody considered that we might need strategies to facilitate the racial integration of learners and educators. Pandor chairs the National Council of Provinces.

The main aim of this Colloquium was to hear papers that reflected on the latest research in both local and international contexts. The Colloquium learnt that the large majority of schools in South Africa remain uni- or mono-racial and that there are small pockets of integration. But who is integrated into what, how and with what effects still needs a great deal of work.

A paper by Professor Crain Soudien, Head of the School of Education at UCT, and Mr Nazir Carrim from the Wits School of Education, showed that the dominant model of integration is assimilation. They approached the concept of integration largely within the framework of the concept of inclusion.

Their approach is that integration must be approached with reference to difference, that class, race, gender and other differences are always interlocked and entangled, and that present within every inclusion are exclusions.

Within this conceptual approach, their main conclusions were that constructions of race and schooling dictated the mode of assimilation into schools. The consequence has been the development of a two-tier system in which social class is a major factor in determining who is included and who is excluded.

A contribution by Harvard's Professor Gary Orfield drew attention to a very different set of issues. Here the most important message was that diversity is a good thing and that diverse classrooms improve the life-chances

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of learners. Dr Sarada Balagopalan, from Delhi University in India, addressed the deep exclusions in poor communities and raised questions about the social constructions of formal schooling, and how this determines the terms on which inclusion or integration occurs. Together the two papers suggest

important new areas for research which will help to explain some of the complexities raised by the Soudien and Carrim paper.

Papers from the University of Natal and the Human Rights Commission, among others, showed that there are initiatives to give students and teachers the diversity of experiences that would enable white teachers to go into black schools and black teachers to go into white schools with confidence, but that much more needs to be done in this realm.

Professor Thobeka Mda, Dean of the Faculty of Education at Unisa, showed that one of the greatest challenges for African learners in desegregated schools is the English medium of instruction, coupled with educators' lack of knowledge of the learners' home languages. Schools often say that they are "colour blind" and that they treat all learners the same. But this means that they provide no extra support for learners whose home language is not English (or Afrikaans, as the case may be). Such an oversight ultimately means discrimination against some learners.

The Colloquium identified a number of priorities for further research and intervention. These have provided a long-term agenda of research for the school integration team. •

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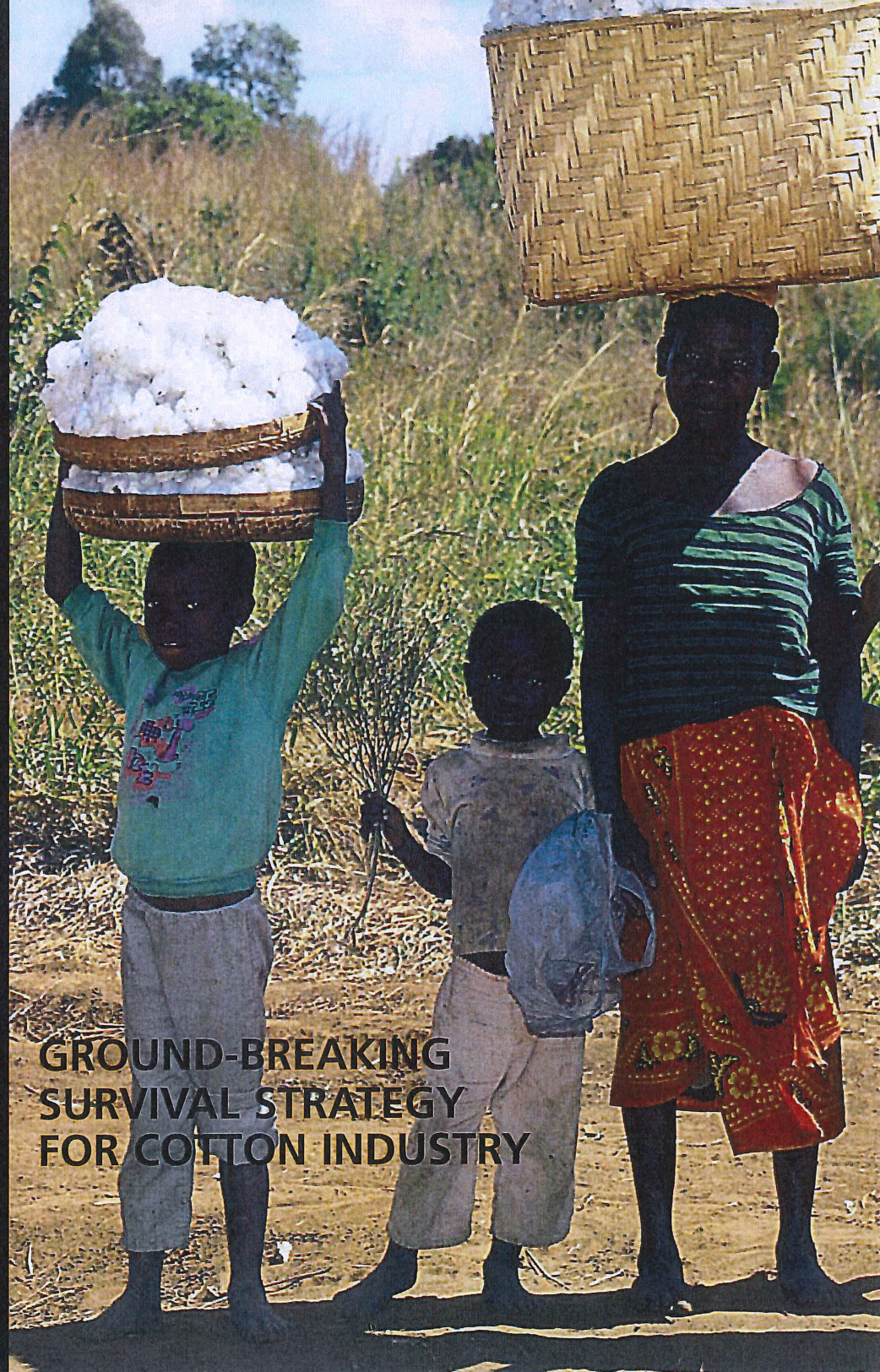


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**GROUND-BREAKING
SURVIVAL STRATEGY
FOR COTTON INDUSTRY**