The challenge of globalization in Africa: The trade union response

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Contents

Editorial

African women in the front line, by Mamounata Cissé and Natacha David 1

Regional integration in Africa: Getting it right, by Mohammed Mwamadzingo 7

The challenge of the informal economy, by Emile Delvaux 13

A new approach to adjustment, by Lawrence Egulu 18

Multi-speed globalization, democratization and conditionalities, by François Misser 23

AIDS: Prevention and tritherapies – no contraindication for the South, by Jacky Delorme 28

Building an IT-richer Africa, by Marc Bélanger 31

The impact of globalization in Africa and the response of trade unions: The case of South Africa, by Shermain Mannah 35

African press and globalization: An unfinished transformation, by Jean-Paul Marthoz 42

The brain drain: Losing one’s head, by André Linard 47
The global market has largely been out of reach for Africa. But many of the ill-effects of globalization have already hit that continent, where most of its 780 million people, or more than 10 per cent of the world’s population, are afflicted by poverty, inequality, exclusion, discrimination, war and disease, as well as bad weather and climate changes.

Many of Africa’s woes are, however, man-made. While good governance, democracy, respect for human and trade union rights, social dialogue and a strong independent voice for labour have been in short supply for too many years, the international community also has to share some of the blame. The structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, designed to help borrower countries put their economies in order and encourage investment and growth, have not only failed to address poverty, they have in many instances deepened it.

Education and health budgets have been drastically reduced, depriving a majority of people of access to basic public services. Millions of people have been thrown into the precarious informal economy. Deprived of social protection, they just manage to survive. The essential social needs of the people have been ignored when African governments and aid donors struggle to stabilize crisis-torn economies. Worse, recent change in labour laws in certain countries have undermined whatever labour protection these were supposed to guarantee to working people and their families. Export processing zones were able to flourish at the expense of long-fought-for workers’ rights and international labour standards.

What one-party states and other undemocratic regimes have left has been a huge foreign debt, which not only signed the future of generations of Africans away, but in fact has never even benefited the populations.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also hit Africa hardest and while poverty is among the key spreading agents of the disease, prevention, care and cure largely depend on political, economic and social priorities, including those that should figure prominently on top of the agenda of the international community.

All this is dramatically true. Africa has for too long been a forgotten continent and a battleground for vested interests that go much beyond its borders. Natural resources have been stolen, international aid has shrunk and development brought to a halt.

Yet, another Africa is emerging, forward-looking, determined to bring about a better future. Trade unions are part of that future and they should help to shape it for the coming generations.

While much has been written about these African problems, *Labour Education* looks at Africa from a different perspective. Africa has resources,
both human and natural, it has potential markets and it has moved towards strengthening democracy. How can all this meet the challenges posed by globalization, how can Africa make globalization deliver to its citizens and how can unions contribute to this process? Many answers to these questions can be found in this issue, even if it does not claim to be exhaustive.

Special tribute is paid to African women who, with the help of the trade union movement and other sectors of civil society, are leading the way to a prosperous Africa based on growth, sustainable development, democracy and human and trade union rights. Despite economic, cultural, institutional or even physical hurdles, African women organize and struggle. Africa’s prospects will depend on their input and on the place they will be given in shaping the future. Women are not only to benefit from development, they should be recognized as key actors in the process.

Experience also shows that the informal economy is no longer out of reach for organized labour. Efforts by trade unions and other groups, with support from the International Labour Office and its Bureau for Workers’ Activities are achieving positive results. Workers in the informal economy are increasingly able to make their voices heard and improve their situation.

Regional economic integration processes are in place and could provide an entry point to making global markets at long last paying social dividends. While strengthening their presence at national level, trade unions have a central role to play to ensure that economic integration indeed delivers in terms of improving living and working conditions.

The digital divide could also be overcome, not from one day to the next, but likely as a mid-term objective, enabling Africans themselves to design technologies made for Africans and compatible with the rest of the global network.

Democratization is leading to a better political environment in many countries and democracy has taken solid roots in others. Like the trade union movement, the media have found new freedom to act as independent and contributing players to progress and debate.

Success will, however, require support from the international community. Initiatives on reducing or abolishing the debts of Africa’s poorest countries need to be looked at more generously by international financial institutions, along the lines long suggested by the international trade union movement.

Assistance in combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including making drugs accessible to victims of the disease and support for local preventive action, is urgently needed. Increased foreign aid should go to Africa, and the donors should insist on good governance, democracy and respect for human and trade union rights. High priority should be given to investments in infrastructure and agriculture. The World Bank and the IMF should keep their promise to listen to the views of local actors, in particular those of trade unions, in devising, implementing and assessing adjustment programmes.

African governments, employers and trade unions also have a major contribution to make in promoting an environment conducive to growth, social justice and democracy. Social dialogue should be a central pillar of the new Africa. It could provide a sound basis for a large consensus
on policies that will put Africa’s best resources in the centre stage: its people. Education, health and social development are basic needs that should be addressed now. They also represent the best investment for a prosperous Africa.

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Special thanks go to ACTRAV’s representatives in the field, Ibrahim Mayaki (Abidjan), John Fallah (Addis Ababa), Francisco Monteiro (Dakar), Mohammed Mwamadzingo (Harare) and to Abdoulaye Diallo and Ditiro Saleshando (ACTRAV Africa desk officers in Geneva) who helped identify issues and contributors and helped design the concept of this issue of Labour Education.
Traditionally there is no role for African women in society. They usually find themselves relegated to second-class citizen status. Laws and customs make it much harder for women to access the factors of production (land and credit), and to obtain education, training, information and health care in order to play a full role in the economy and in society in general. All too often they are unaware of their legal rights and even if they are, they are unable to claim them. Their daily grind involves them toiling under a wholly unfair burden of family and household chores. What is more, in the home, but also at school, in the workplace, in the street and throughout society, African women are often subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. In most African countries this gender-related violence gives rise to a social, religious and cultural context that gives men a superior status and a de facto monopoly on all sources of power.

The failings of the education system

The discriminations that women are prey to condition their view of themselves and their future chances from a very early age. They are trapped by a poor image based on dependency, subjugation and subordination to men. In traditional African societies, women are like shadows, with no real existence. In many of the continent’s countries, girls are given less to eat than their brothers, are forced to work harder and have much more limited access to schools and health care.

Even though most regions of the world have seen major advances in primary education in recent decades, a report published last year by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) condemned the slowdown in compulsory schooling in Africa which, it says, “is resulting from high costs for parents and the poorer quality of teaching”.1 In sub-Saharan Africa, only 60 per cent of children complete their primary education. This training deficit is of particular concern for future women when we consider that in 22 African states there are 80 per cent fewer girls than boys in full-time education. The UNFPA notes that “a lack of education, especially for women, plays a bigger role in reducing infant deaths than the combined effects of a higher income, better hygiene and work in the modern sector”. For example, Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe, which have the highest levels of female enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa, also have the lowest infant mortality rates.

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African women in the front line

African women are subject to any number of crushing constraints, ranging from economic to social, cultural, institutional, legal and physical. And yet, despite all these obstacles, which could so easily result in a passiveness dictated by their traditional roles, African women are remarkably dynamic and combative.

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Where work is concerned, African women are too often confined to “unproductive” tasks which are poorly paid (or, more commonly, unpaid) such as looking after the children, performing domestic chores, caring for the sick and the elderly, providing informal education, working the family’s land, fetching the water and wood, etc. Many women work in the agricultural sector and in the informal sector where conditions are appalling, the work force coefficient high, the degree of technicality and qualification low and the pay mediocre. In West Africa, women sell between 70 and 90 per cent of all agricultural and fishing products. Women street sellers form part of an informal economy that generates around 30 per cent of the wealth of urban centres. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) reported last year that while women work in strategic sectors such as agriculture and food production, the financial instruments and services offered by the banks and financial institutions (insurance companies and lenders) are channelled first and foremost to export sectors and urban, non-agricultural activities, thereby excluding most women from these circuits. This situation explains many of the problems experienced by women as they try to get more out of the land they farm. For example, UNFPA estimates that if women farmers in Kenya were given the same level of support as their male counterparts in the export sector, they could increase land yield by more than 20 per cent.

The weight of tradition and crises

Those rare women who do manage to overcome the education barrier are still faced with gender equality issues. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) recently reported that women still represent only a small minority of African journalists, whereas in the industrialized nations nearly 50 per cent of journalists are women. “Culture always keeps women subordinate, even in South Africa where the end of apartheid led to the creation of a black male elite, but no female elite,” remarks South African journalist and senior IFJ official Farahana Ismail.

In 1994, the World Bank estimated that women accounted for 44 per cent of the workforce in Africa, but more recently the International Labour Office noted that the activity rate for women on the continent was statistically in decline, probably because more women are now working in the invisible, informal sector.

The situation created by tradition is further exacerbated by the serious economic and social crisis that Africa is facing, together with a series of bloody conflicts and fresh epidemics that are sweeping the continent. Women are suffering from all of these things to a much greater extent than men.

Aggravated by the unfair burden of debt, the structural adjustment policies imposed by the international financial institutions (the IMF and the World Bank) have had disastrous effects on employment (structured and informal) and on all basic public services such as education and health care. These structural adjustment policies have greatly contributed to the process of advanced dilapidation in all the key sectors of African society, punishing women in particular. They have been even more affected by a wave of privatizations: first, because formal employment among African women is often limited just to the public sector, making them prime targets for streamlining programmes; and second, because it is the women who have to counter on a daily basis and as best they can the failings or even total absence of basic services previously provided by the public authorities. The deficiencies or even total disappearance of the social security systems also account for the growing impoverishment of African women.

Health care is increasingly overlooked in national budgets. As a result, one African woman in 13 dies in the course of her pregnancy or during childbirth, whereas in the industrialized world UNICEF reckons that the same ratio is one per 4,085 births. A survey reports that in the United Republic of Tanzania, the say-
ing among future mothers is: “I’m going to sea to find a baby. But the journey is long and I may never return.”

African women are also in the frontline when it comes to the bloody wars that regularly tear African societies apart. Their sacrifice is all the more unfair because they rarely initiate these conflicts. And yet, in the midst of all this fighting they continue to play an essential role, ensuring the survival of their families. Doubtless women, too, will have to bear the brunt of the rebuilding process. In Rwanda, after the genocide, women constituted 70 per cent of the population and half of all households were headed by women, most of them widows. With no work, no home and often the victims of serious physical and psychological trauma, they nevertheless continue to fight to survive and build the future.

Victims of AIDS twice over

African women are also paying the cost of the epidemics that are decimating African populations, and especially HIV/AIDS. They are both direct victims (more than 12 million African women have already died of AIDS, often because they were forced into having unprotected sex), and indirect victims as they care for the sick or take care of the 11 million-plus orphans who have lost their parents to the disease. According to UNAIDS, women account for more than half of all Africa’s HIV-positive adults and AIDS sufferers (see the article by Jacky Delorme on page 28). More specifically, the UNFPA report indicates that there are 2 million more HIV-positive women than men in Africa.

Gender discrimination, resulting from tradition and the current socio-economic context, leads to major discrepancies in the way in which resources are distributed, with a significant negative impact for the development of women, but also of African society as a whole. Discrimination has a cost. As the UNFPA says: “Promoting gender equality means promoting growth and the stable development of economic systems with all the social and (strictu sensu) economic benefits that this brings.”

However, despite all of these constraints, much credence in Africa is still given to the idea that “women manage to get by”. And it is true, they clearly are “getting by”, be it in rural agriculture, the crafts or even micro-commerce. Today, African women know that they can rely on nobody but themselves, and increasing numbers are gaining greater confidence in their own abilities and finding ways of achieving autonomy. While they remain in the minority, these women are fighting against prejudice and for their freedom and are not afraid of taking risks to achieve their ends. A gradual change is taking place in the attitude of women towards their traditional social subjugation. This does not necessarily mean that they are rejecting tradition, but it does demonstrate a desire to place the emphasis on the positive aspects of traditions, such as solidarity for personal development for the good of all.

While African societies are fighting to rise to the challenges of modernity, African women have become the central force behind this drive for change. They have developed a technical capital based on know-how and the skills acquired through associations. They have also developed a social capital based on community life and the principles of solidarity and reciprocity which are demonstrated by the famous African women’s tontines, among other things. They choose solidarity as their strategy for collective action and prefer social and knowledge capitalization to financial accumulation.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: “Gender equality is more than an end in itself. It is a precondition for leading the fight in favour of poverty reduction, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”

Many women’s associations and organizations have grown up, driven by the aims of peace, economic prosperity, social justice, democracy and human rights.

The trade union movement is also increasingly present in these circles. It is
calling for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the approach to structural adjustment and the fight against debt. Similarly, the international trade union movement is fighting for the inclusion of the ILO’s fundamental standards, and in particular the concept of equality, in the area of international trade. While this global struggle may be far removed from the central concerns of the women working their fingers to the bone in African fields, workshops or marketplaces, it is nevertheless closely bound up with the improvement of their general situation.

On the ground, many African unions have developed programmes to raise women’s awareness of their rights and to help them gain their freedom through literacy schemes, general education and training. This awareness-raising work is targeting both union and non-union members. The trade union world was once considered to be the sole preserve of men, and women were completely marginalized. Gradually, however, the African unions have developed special programmes to encourage women to assume their responsibilities at every level of trade union structure, and attitudes are starting to change too.

Changing mentalities

However, all too often there is a gulf between the theory and reality of political resolutions. There are still relatively few women on the governing bodies of trade union organizations. Women’s officer at the Ghana Trades Union Congress Veronica Kofie believes that union management remains too distant from the real concerns of women. She maintains: “We have to go in on the ground and oversee the work of those people who come into contact with women workers. We have to get women interested and take greater account of the problems related to their specific situations, such as the fact that more of them today are single mothers.” The GTUC has already begun to adopt a more gender-neutral language in the collective agreements it has negotiated and, to raise the profile of its work, its women’s committee has created a trust that has launched an insurance scheme, a taxi service and other practical support.

In order to combat sexist stereotyping, the trade unions are not only keen to raise women’s awareness but they are also seeking to change male mentalities. This has resulted in training programmes addressing a mixed audience, more suited to the daily situation of women trade unionists and in particular taking account of the constraints relating to the disproportionate burden of family and domestic responsibilities.

The trade union response

So what are the unions actually doing to recruit more women? Firstly, there are now more women in the recruitment teams. Secondly, they are laying more emphasis on themes of importance to women, such as health care, security, and family planning, and focusing more on young female workers.

The fight for increased private sector unionization remains a priority objective as a way of increasing the union power of women: severe cutbacks in the public sector have led them to seek alternative employment in the private sector. The main stumbling block here is increased job precariousness and anti-union harassment. Mariatou Coulibaly, a woman union leader in Côte d’Ivoire, reports that in her country “the coup d’Etat did much to galvanize workers, especially women who were directly affected by the wave of mass redundancies. These women all contacted us and we have been able to help them, most notably by calculating with them (in place of their boss) the exact amount of redundancy money they were entitled to. This has proved a worthy investment of the union’s time: before the coup we had 10 female members, now we have 67.”

Of course, the African women’s fight also involves the traditional trade union battle for better working conditions. Women unionists now have no hesitation
about voicing their demands. In June in Lagos (Nigeria) the nurses came out on strike to demand higher wages at a time when doctors’ pay had been increased. In Bamako (Mali), workers in the drinks and ice creams industry, one of that country’s leading sectors, stopped work in April in protest at what they described as near-slavery conditions. In particular, they were complaining of eyesight problems relating to the unprotected use of caustic soda.

The challenge of the informal economy

If there is one area that the trade unions really need to enter in force to defend women’s rights in Africa it is the informal economy. To that end, the unions must develop new methods of approach and organization, taking account of the extremely low incomes of these female workers and the very limited time they can devote to trade union activities because of their family duties. The unions also need to find ways of overcoming the isolation of many female workers in the informal economy, especially those who work at home or in remote rural areas. In Zambia and Ghana, the ICFTU and its African regional organization (AFRO) are therefore funding special projects in favour of women in the informal economy (see the article by Emile Delvaux on p. 13).

In many cases these workers have already organized themselves into associations or cooperatives, so the unions can develop collaboration and networking strategies with all of these actors already active on the ground. Other examples include the unions’ support for women’s cooperatives in Senegal.

The trade unions are also looking to provide immediate and tangible benefits, such as the creation of social funds to make up for the absence of a social security system, facilities for accessing credit and land, administrative and legal aid, education and training, and the provision of basic infrastructures (electricity, water, transport, sanitation, storage areas, crèches, meals, etc.). The unions are also in a position to help improve the income of these women by simplifying collective sales and acquisitions, encouraging the exchange of experiences, offering protection against violence (in particular for street sellers), and by making the subcontracting chain visible in order to negotiate with employers on basic protection for homeworkers. The unions can back micro-projects, in particular those that assist with rural development, and facilitate access to the new fair trade networks for the goods produced by women, as is being done in Benin and Burkina Faso.

New lines of action

Another major challenge facing the African unions is to find a way of organizing female workers in the continent’s rapidly developing free export zones. The countries that host these zones offer foreign investors a cheap workforce and an environment free of industrial unrest, generally by cracking down hard on all union action. As a result, these free zones, which mainly employ women, all too often fail to recognize any trade union rights and exploitation is commonplace (very low wages, precarious employment contracts, sexual harassment of female workers, abominable working conditions, etc.). In Morocco, despite the fierce anti-trade union repression, the unions are fighting to organize the workers in textile plants in industrial zones. In Mauritius, the unions have set up a crèche for the children of women working in the sugar plantations.

Where the fight against HIV and AIDS is concerned, the unions also have a central role to play to ensure a gender perspective in all awareness-raising and victim support programmes. They are also playing an active role in the international campaign in favour of making pharmaceutical products financially accessible to African AIDS sufferers. In many African unions the women lead the way in the battle against this pandemic. Florida Mukan-damutsa of the Rwandan CESTRAR union
told *Trade Union World* recently: “Women are more subject to the consequences of the disease. They are more resistant to the virus and therefore live longer with AIDS. They must look after the children. We have set up an association of AIDS sufferers in Rwanda. It is a mixed association, but women represent a large majority.”

To bridge the technological gulf that divides Africa from the rest of the world and to foster sustainable development, the unions are calling for better access to the new information technologies for all African workers (training and infrastructure). Here again, the gender issue must be stressed, for it is essential that women, who are already discriminated against on every front, do not find themselves at the bottom of the digital divide that separates the more educated from the less qualified, the richer from the poorer.

All of these lines of trade union action, already being tackled with imagination, courage and success by the various African trade unions, are converging on the same overall goal: taking better account of the specific needs and priorities of women and their role in the economy and society in general. This is a key factor in the future of the continent, a question of fairness, but also a question of survival. As everywhere in the world, but perhaps even more in Africa given the special part that women play in development there despite immense difficulties, the future will depend on the role that is given to women.

Notes


3 *Trade Union World*, monthly publication of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), (Brussels, December 2000).
Development requires the organization of social and economic activities on a much larger scale than is currently found in individual countries in Africa. Most countries in Africa are relatively small, not only in population, but also in terms of economic output. This has led to efforts to promote regional and subregional integration as a major strategy for promoting intra-regional trade and accelerating development and structural transformation. In spite of the very modest results achieved so far in this ongoing process, the strategy remains a major instrument for helping the region to overcome the problems of economic fragmentation, and promoting economic diversification and interlinkages between production units in various countries.

Regional and subregional structures in Africa

Undoubtedly, the first argument for regional integration is that of efficiency: when producers and countries specialize in goods that they can produce more cheaply, the whole region gains. Second, economies of scale that cannot be made on the domestic market can often be achieved on a larger regional market. Third, regional integration can provide experience and the benefits of competition for generally high-cost producers with less risk than in the wider world.

There is a long history of regional integration arrangements in Africa, beginning with the customs unions in 1900 between Kenya (then known as the East African Protectorate) and Uganda. At present, there are broadly two kinds of regional groupings in Africa: those sponsored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and those resulting from other initiatives. The UNECA has promoted three subregional arrangements: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

At the Pan-African level, the treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) agreed upon in Abuja in 1991 was the culmination of previous declarations by African Heads of State and Government and their ministers regarding their desire to create an Africa-wide economic community (such as the Kinshasa Declaration of 1976, the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos of 1980). At the 37th Summit of Heads of State and Government in Lusaka, Zambia (July 2001), the OAU was formally transformed into the African Union (AU) after 50 of the

Regional integration in Africa: Getting it right

Economic integration can be more successful if members of civil society, especially trade unions, are involved in the decision-making process and if their rights are enshrined and respected. How best can trade unions play a more meaningful role in promoting regional integration, and how can they ensure that human and trade union rights are respected?

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OAU’s 53 member States ratified a new treaty. The new Secretary-General of the AU has been asked to transform the OAU into the AU within a year.

In western Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) came into existence in 1975 with the aim of eventually becoming a customs union and then a common market, while integrating states in the West African sub-region. It comprises 15 member States (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo), ten of which have allegiances with other subregional groupings. The revised ECOWAS Treaty, signed in 1993, seeks to consolidate and expand the achievements of ECOWAS and to tackle the excessive number of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) in the subregion, strengthen the executive capacity of the ECOWAS secretariat and expand the political functions of the community. It also accords supranational status to ECOWAS as the sole representative institution for the West African subregion. Among other things, it added peacekeeping to the ECOWAS list of objectives.

Presently, the West African subregion has the largest number of IGOs (about 40 in all). These include the Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine (UEMOA, comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, the Niger, Senegal and Togo), ECOWAS and the Mano River Union (embracing Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). The UEMOA was established in 1994. A major difference between UEMOA and ECOWAS is that the latter has a functional monetary integration component.

On the basis of the agreement reached at the ECOWAS Council of Ministers meeting in 1993, all remaining IGOs should have been transformed into specialized agencies of ECOWAS by 2005.

Numerous activities aiming to establish cross-border initiatives in eastern and southern Africa in order to increase trade, investments and payments among collaborating countries have been launched. This subregion now has the second highest number of IGOs after West Africa.

The Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA) was created in 1978 and laid the groundwork for the creation of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) in November 1993. COMESA now embraces 21 countries, after the United Republic of Tanzania withdrew its membership in 2000. The PTA embarked on five main areas of cooperation: monetary, fiscal and financial; trade development and customs; transport and communication; industry, energy and the environment; and agricultural development.

The COMESA treaty calls for the establishment of a customs union through the removal of all trade barriers and the establishment of a common external tariff and rules of origin. The treaty anticipates the coordination of macroeconomic policies as countries move towards the free movement of services and capital as well as currency convertibility.

Unlike the PTA, COMESA now stresses a commitment to the redistribution of the benefits of integration, through special regional programmes to promote the development of the least-developed countries in the region to achieve balanced development within the common market. Specific areas of cooperation have been identified, such as trade liberalization and customs cooperation; transport and communication; industry and energy; monetary affairs and finance; agriculture, and economic and social development.

Within the same subregion there are also the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU). SADC (which includes ten of the COMESA states) replaced the Southern African Development Coordination Conference which was perceived as an organization whose goal was to reduce the subregion’s dependence on apartheid South Africa. SADC seeks greater coordination of external tariffs and the promotion of the free movement of capital and labour. It also has an interest in set-
ting up regional infrastructure authorities and a development bank.

SACU was only established in its present form in 1969, but it stems directly from the 1910 agreement between South Africa and the three British High Commission Territories of Basutoland (now Lesotho), Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and Swaziland.

The East African zone remained rather dormant for much of the period following the demise of the East African Community in 1977. On 22 November 1991, the three East African presidents met in Nairobi and agreed to reactivate and deepen cooperation between the three countries (Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania). At the second tripartite summit on East African Cooperation (EAC) in Kampala in November 1993, a protocol was signed establishing the secretariat of the Permanent Tripartite Commission for East African Cooperation in Arusha, Tanzania. Since the signing of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community in 2000, the Commission has been transformed into the East African Community.

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), grouping together Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda, is another IGO. On 18 April 1995, an extraordinary summit of IGAD Heads of State and Government decided to launch a new initiative involving the revitalization and restructuring of IGAD as an instrument for expanded cooperation and subregional economic integration among IGAD member States.

Other groupings in the same subregion are the Kagera Basin Organization (KBO), and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) consisting of Mauritius, Madagascar, the Comoros and Seychelles. The IOC recently established its secretariat in Quatre Bornes, Mauritius. In addition, in early 1995, the possibility of building a platform for regional cooperation in the wider Indian rim was initiated. Australia, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Oman, Singapore and South Africa all participated in a meeting clearing the ground for future cooperation in the region which led to the creation of the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative (IORI). Areas of cooperation were identified. They include trade facilitation, trade and investment promotion and cooperation in the fields of science and technology and human resource development.

In North Africa, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), consisting of Algeria, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, is one of the oldest subregional cooperation bodies in Africa. A Maghreb Common Market and Customs Union was to enter into force as of 1995. Progress has been rather slow, however, as there are still a number of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. There are differences in economic models as well as lack of coordinated political decisions (e.g. during the Gulf War). The countries of the subregion import their oil from the United Arab Emirates rather than from Algeria or the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (which incidentally produce about three-quarters of the subregion’s oil requirements).

In Central Africa, intra-subregional trade among Central African States is still minimal. The treaty establishing the Union douanière des États de l’Afrique centrale (UDEAC) was signed in 1964. The Communauté économique des États de l’Afrique centrale (CEEAC), based in Libreville, and UDEAC have separately embarked on cooperation in the areas of food and agriculture, industry, transport and communication. The third economic grouping – the communauté économique des pays des Grand Lacs (CEPGL), consisting of Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is inactive.

Achievements and constraints of integration

Despite the existence of these regional groupings, the African region remains beset by weak cross-border economic links. Nonetheless, there is ambiguous empirical evidence on the achievements of regional integration efforts in Africa.
While there have been improvements in intra-regional trade flows, very little progress has been made towards integrated infrastructure development despite the potential for very high benefits.

Numerous problems have continued to impede the progress of regional integration in Africa. The production structures of most African countries are the same and hence exportable products tend to be competitive rather than complementary. Inadequate transport and communication have partly contributed to the disjointed nature of African economies and severely restricted the movement of goods, persons and capital. In addition, the lack of currency convertibility, the continued existence of tariff and non-tariff barriers, a fear of losing out to more developed member State(s) of subregional groupings, and differences among political leaders have remained obstacles to closer integration throughout the continent.

**Regional integration: Trade union structures**

There is almost a one-to-one transposition of trade unions alongside the creation of a regional integration process in Africa. In **southern Africa**, the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) was formed in March 1993 at its inaugural congress held in Gaborone, Botswana. With 12 affiliates, SATUCC campaigns for the development of strong, independent and self-reliant national trade union centres across the subregion.

In November 1991, SATUCC adopted the Social Charter of Fundamental Rights of Workers in Southern Africa. The charter is a solemn declaration and lays down the broad principles of a model southern African labour law and, more generally, the place of the worker in society. In March 1992, the Southern African Labour Council (SALC), a tripartite structure, adopted the Social Charter.

In **East Africa**, the East African Trade Union Council (EATUC) is an umbrella organization bringing together the national trade union centres within the East Africa Community member States: Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. EATUC was established in 1988 and is currently composed of the Central Organization of Trade Unions (Kenya), the National Organization of Trade Unions (Uganda), and the Tanzania Federation of Free Trade Unions. The EATUC’s broad objective is to integrate workers’ interests and efforts in the East African region with a view to developing a common approach towards enhancing social and economic justice, through the participation of workers’ organizations at every level of regional integration. The organization is also aiming to promote cooperation among workers in East Africa through the joint development of workers’ education programmes, research activities and integration of the gender dimension in trade union work.

As a regional workers’ body, EATUC is instrumental in ensuring that the East African Community involves labour in all issues regarding regional integration, institutes tripartism as a method of work, promotes the ratification of international labour standards by the member States and the harmonization of labour laws and policies in East Africa, and encourages the concept of free movement of the factors of production in the region. In addition, the EATUC has also adopted an extended list of objectives such as the elimination of hunger through food security, the creation of productive employment, and the promotion of conflict resolution in East Africa.

In **West Africa**, despite its revitalization in 1999, the Organization of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA) currently has no major activities. In **Central Africa**, the sub-regional trade union body, Organization des travailleurs de l’Afrique centrale (OTAC), still has a long way to go. In **North Africa**, the Union des syndicats des travailleurs du Maghreb arabe (USTMA) brings together trade union federations in the subregion. On 1 May 1991, USTMA issued a Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers in the Maghreb. The charter welcomed the creation of the AMU and emphasized the need to make the social dimensions part of
integration efforts. There is also the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU) which groups trade union centres from the Arab world.

Union responses to integration

Many countries in Africa, as is the case in other parts of the world, are taking greater interest in regional economic integration and have developed programmes for the promotion of this cause. Workers’ organizations, for their part, have not dragged their feet in supporting the emergence and strengthening of regional integration. In fact, trade unions are on record as having called for increased government efforts to bring about faster regional economic integration. Trade unions have been reliable partners in various activities of such economic and social interest groups.

Of concern to the trade union organizations is the fact that the resulting regional integration agreements have mainly concentrated on capital and natural resource mobilization and have tended to ignore the critical role of human resource mobilization and other social aspects. Trade unions have reiterated that, for integration to be successful, the stakeholders, of whom workers and their organizations are a major component, must be involved in the design process, decision-making machineries and implementation of all programmes and project activities. Social aspects such as poverty eradication, human and trade union rights, the creation of decent jobs and the observance of international labour standards, should always be among the main priorities.

A further challenge to trade unions is the fact that modern industrial relations systems in most countries have primarily involved the national arena, with employment regulation rooted in agreements between national unions and employers’ organizations, and legislation enacted by the national States.

The liberalization of international trade, the globalization of financial markets and the growing importance of multinational companies appear to threaten such nationally based systems. The emergence of regional labour markets (the East African Community, for instance) implies that key decisions affecting national labour markets are taken outside the country concerned. Cross-national comparisons of labour costs affect national competitiveness and also shape corporate investment decisions; this jeopardizes the conduct of national collective bargaining. The stability of national currencies seems to require that governments adopt deflationary economic policies, often against the interests of labour.

Pessimists argue that internationalization completely undermines the effectiveness of trade unions. More cautious analysts suggest that, at the very least, their room for manoeuvre has become much narrower than in the past. The implication is that the unions must strengthen their own international organizations in response.

Consequently, trade unions are called to play a more active role in achieving a social dimension of globalization and regional integration. In addition to campaigning for their right to be consulted, they are instituting mechanisms to strengthen subregional workers’ organizations through which they can present their views. The formulation of social charters of fundamental workers’ rights and their incorporation and adoption by the respective regional groupings call for steps to be taken towards ensuring that human and trade union rights are enshrined and respected.

The trade union position is that present efforts to foster economic cooperation and regional integration are doomed to fail if they continue to focus on the narrow areas of international trade and customs union. Although the current schemes of regional integration address broad issues such as resource mobilization, they have generally overemphasized capital and natural resource mobilization, and have tended to ignore the critical role of human resource mobilization in regional economic integration efforts.
Conclusions: Getting integration right

Despite the constraints on effective regional integration, many advisers and researchers in Africa suggest that the need for regional integration still exists and may even be more pressing now that market fragmentation – which remains a problem in Africa – is being eliminated in other parts of the world and as capital mobility continues to rise. It is important to emphasize that regional integration cannot properly succeed in the absence of a sense of belonging and identity of those most affected within the proposed community of countries.

In order for trade unions to benefit from regional economic integration, they should increase their role by ensuring that:

- they are involved in the design stages of any regional integration effort and demand of their governments the right to be involved and consulted, together with other stakeholders, on all matters of regional concern;
- labour and other social issues take centre stage, as there cannot be any economic development devoid of a social dimension;
- they form or revitalize subregional trade union organizations in parallel to the subregional economic groups, enabling them to mobilize their membership and lobby effectively;
- subregional trade union organizations formulate social charters of fundamental workers’ rights in Africa akin to those of SATUCC and USTMA and ensure that they are adopted by the respective economic grouping;
- together with other stakeholders, they spearhead civil education on the attributes of regional integration in order to enhance everybody’s participation; and
- they continue drawing attention to areas of violations of human and trade union rights.

Regional integration is not just an economic issue but is a process of community-building or social construction, not limited to the expansion of regional trade. It requires a holistic and multidimensional approach and should acquire credibility and identity of purpose. Trade unions have a major role to play in ensuring that the process is given a social dimension and that it obtains legitimacy. These two elements have been sorely lacking so far.
One direct consequence of globalization is the surprisingly extensive growth of the informal economy in Africa. The informal economy – an offshoot of this “parallel”, multiform “economy” – has developed alongside conventional sectors of the economy as a kind of negative image of the modern sector. The informal sector has long been a tradition in African countries, especially in rural areas. One example would be seasonal workers. Following the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) during the crises in the 1970s and 1980s, the phenomenon invaded the continent’s towns and cities at an exponential rate. Since that time, globalization and capital development have been grounded in policies focusing on liberalization and deregulation. Such policies sought to dismantle mechanisms used by governments as a means of staving off crises (anti-cyclical policies) and to transfer the key components of economic, social, cultural and even political power to the market under the pretext of ensuring greater efficiency. As the market is not egalitarian, this policy mainly favoured the differences in terms of trade between the developed and developing countries.

Today, entire regions have been sidelined from the global economy (sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, etc.). Flows of capital focus on the “triad”, i.e. the United States, the European Union and Japan. In fact, globalization is having a catastrophic impact on the economy and especially on employment in the majority of countries in the South. The frantic quest for competitiveness is leading to ever-increasing redundancies and wage cuts, while the economic fabric of the formal sector of the economy – public and private – is deteriorating dangerously. Financial and economic crises have followed one after the other at an increasing pace since the 1970s, further aggravating the employment situation and pushing a large number of workers into the informal economy. The international crises experienced today are accentuating this trend, causing a slowdown in the global economy and forcing the major powers to withdraw into themselves.

Explosion of the informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa

The informal economy has spread considerably in sub-Saharan Africa, exploding over the last decade. The economic reforms pursued by governments in the region in a bid to cope with foreign debt and budget deficits have included measures designed to streamline public expenditure, cut government subsidies to public
companies and privatize state-owned companies. This has prompted a dramatic cut in the number of wage-earning jobs in both the public and private sectors. In Burkina Faso, for instance, civil service posts, which accounted for 54 per cent of jobs in the modern sector in 1975, plummeted to a level of 33 per cent in 1985 and then 24 per cent in 1993 – and the situation there is continuing to deteriorate.

Apart from these direct causes of the employment crisis in the formal sector, there are also more remote causes linked to stagnation in the private sector and the low level of entrepreneurship in these countries (faulty management of large production units, lack of support for small and medium-sized businesses, too much economic dependence on the developed countries, lagging technological development, low standards of living and consumption, small domestic markets, and so forth), not to mention inadequate technical and vocational qualifications among the workforce, which is in turn leading to a deterioration in the supply of education. All this has blocked the rapid development of a competitive private sector that is capable of standing in for the public sector in its role as a creator of modern jobs. While the number of jobs in the private and public sectors was falling, growing numbers of young people were entering the labour market – especially in the towns and cities – due to the rural exodus and demographic growth. The emergence of an informal economy is also the result of structural causes, such as the failure of “official” commercial logistics, especially in distribution, and the low capacity for importing the latest products for which there is a high level of demand. To this should be added the corruption of and actions taken by certain “decision-makers”, who have had no hesitation in sabotaging local industrial projects in order to give preference to much more lucrative informal imports – all within a context of persistent civil wars and unstable government.

Accordingly, the informal economy has flourished in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Today it accounts for nearly 80 per cent of urban assets in Burkina Faso. In the Niger, it accounts for between 70 and 80 per cent of commercial GDP and in 1988 accounted for nearly 60 per cent of non-agricultural employment. In that country, the informal economy’s contribution to GDP rose by a factor of three between 1960 and 1997, whereas the contribution made by the modern sector halved over the same period.

The predominance of the informal economy is a common feature of Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Senegal. There are, however, differences from one country to the other. In Mali, the majority of people working in the informal economy are women (59 per cent), while in the Niger women make up just 27.6 per cent of the informal workforce. In 1991, in Senegal the informal economy accounted for 58.7 per cent of the active urban population, compared to 17.8 per cent for the modern sector. Three out of five businesses in the informal economy had just one employee.

Towards a social catastrophe?

Despite the shortage of reliable statistical data, it is estimated that the informal economy absorbs around 60 per cent of urban labour in sub-Saharan Africa. According to a study conducted by the International Labour Office, 93 per cent of the urban jobs created during the current decade will be in the informal economy. The process of globalization, in its current form, seems unlikely to provide opportunities for turning this trend around.

However, the much vaunted merits of the informal economy, specifically its supposedly “stabilizing” role, are increasingly being challenged. Some people are even questioning its long-term viability.

According to World Bank estimates, employment in micro-businesses in sub-Saharan Africa should rise by an average of 6 to 7.5 per cent annually over the next 20 years. During the same period, the informal economy’s contribution to the GNP of the countries in question could reach 35 per cent, while the annual increase in
labour productivity in this sector is set to stagnate at 1.5 per cent.

This kind of outlook raises a series of urgent economic, social and political problems, in that the foreseeable rise in unemployment and poverty poses a serious threat to democracy and the future economic stability of these countries. In fact, we are on a collision course for economic and social disaster. The deterioration of employment is likely to weaken productivity and tragically increase the wage gap between the formal and informal sectors. Moreover, precarious employment, unfavourable working conditions, the lack of and ignorance about social welfare and health care measures, and the absence of any collective organization of labour are all factors which are blocking the growth and competitiveness of the informal economy and could encourage the continued survival of abuses and discriminatory policies targeting workers in this sector. Lastly, political, religious and ideological pressure on economically and socially fragile groups can lead to humanitarian crises and civil wars.

Since 1972, the International Labour Office (ILO) has had to intervene in countries in this part of the world in order to provide support and advice on policies and actions aimed at boosting the performance and organization of the informal economy. Several projects have been pursued, for example, to help craftsmen in a number of French- and English-speaking African countries.

However, in the absence of a favourable macroeconomic environment, all these actions will remain limited. Back at the 78th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1991, the ILO emphasized the need to integrate informal economies into national economies. Implementing this kind of strategy will, by definition, mean adopting or bolstering economic, fiscal and social policies that encourage changes in the informal sector. One of the best ways of achieving this objective is to give workers in the informal economy an organizational and institutional framework enabling them to become credible dialogue partners with decision-makers.

Due to their vocation, the trade unions would seem to be the ideal partners in helping to define and create just such a framework. This would judiciously increase the institutional, economic and social impact of trade union organizations and workers in the informal economy.

It is within this context, and with these key objectives in mind, that the “Trade unions and the informal sector” project was devised by the ILO’s Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV) and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida). Implemented from June 1998 to August 2001, the project focused on four French-speaking countries in West Africa: Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Senegal.

To date, it is patently obvious that in these four countries trade union organizations do not yet have the institutional capacity to defend the interests of workers in the informal economy. On the one hand there are historical reasons for this, since unions in these countries have traditionally focused exclusively on workers and civil servants in the modern sector.

Nevertheless, some confederations had already been working with certain occupations in the informal economy for several years and could approach these workers. Yet they only rarely defended the specific interests of these workers but included them in the demands and general agreements covering the modern sector. These experiences, however, show that the unionization of workers in the informal economy is an achievable goal, and that it can have mutual benefits for workers and unions alike. It allows the former to improve their standard of living, working conditions and social protection, and the latter to bolster their negotiating power as a force that truly represents the interests of all workers nationally.

This kind of approach entails the organizational and structural transformation of trade unions and the political determination to include the various occupations found in the informal economy. In fact, the aim is to return to the very first forms of worker organization and to find a way of getting workers from the informal
economy and workers from the modern sector to cohabit within the same organizations, leaving behind the corporatism and certain protectionist attitudes which otherwise threaten to paralyse trade union organizations up against the explosion in the informal economy. Opening up to include female trade unionists is also a precondition for the structural development of unions, since women form the majority of those working in the informal economy.

Given the diverse trade union landscape in these four countries, the “trade unions and the informal sector” project aimed to support the efforts of 14 national union organizations, four in Burkina Faso, two in Mali, two in the Niger and six in Senegal.

The project faced two challenges. The first challenge was to promote the solidarity and organization of workers in the informal economy so that they can establish effective institutions collectively to defend their interests and be recognized as valid dialogue partners by the decision-makers. The second challenge was to encourage the trade union organizations to bolster their operational resources and train their technical officers to diagnose the problems and needs of players in the informal economy. A participatory approach was selected with a view to achieving these two objectives.

To limit the scope of the project to its own human and financial resources, five professions or occupations in four regions were selected per country for the pilot project (there are some 250 different occupations in the informal economy in these countries). More than 2,000 facilitators, a majority of whom were women, were trained by trade unionists during the project.

These trade union facilitators were transformed into veritable on-site development officers. In this way, they helped with the creation of professional associations, the creation of mutual benefit societies and cooperatives, and the establishment of micro-credit funds. All in all, some 43 new professional structures were created in Burkina Faso, 14 trade union federations and credit funds were set up in Mali, 18 new trade union structures of federated occupations were established in the Niger, and four cooperatives and four mutual societies have seen the light of day in Senegal.

The recruitment and unionization of workers in the informal economy was supported by a campaign to raise awareness about health protection at work and accident prevention. A parallel information campaign on sexually transmissible diseases and HIV/AIDS was also carried out. During the period in question, the majority of trade union organizations were restructuring in order to take in workers from the informal economy according to their profession and region. A special effort was made to give women a representative place in these new structures.

Conclusions

The pilot project initiated by ACTRAV and Danida could not encompass the entire reality of the informal economy in the four countries in question, but it did achieve some major progress, including:

- raising awareness of union organizations involved in the project countries to the need to organize and unionize workers in the informal economy;
- an undertaking by union organizations to henceforth take account of the concerns of such workers by setting up, within their own organizations, secretariats and/or departments responsible for issues concerning the informal economy;
- improving relations between trade union organizations in a given country;
- bolstering the capacities and skills of trade union organizations by training facilitators;
- arousing the awareness and enthusiasm of workers in the informal economy about their rights and freedoms, and the ability to exploit their potential offered by the informal economy;
creating unions and associations of workers in the informal economy and the establishment of mutual benefit societies in the health sector, social welfare institutions, savings and credit institutions, and various cooperatives managed and run by workers from the informal economy;

- the enlargement of structures in the trade union movement in the countries participating in the project and the entrance of women into the trade union structures of the informal economy;

- the change of attitude and mentality on the part of the public authorities, which henceforth undertake in several countries to give favourable consideration to the concerns of workers in the informal economy, such concerns being brought to their attention by trade union organizations and by the new trade union structures in the informal economy.

These achievements during the pilot phase easily fall within the project objectives, i.e. helping workers in the informal economy to organize into representative structures capable of defending their material and moral interests, while ensuring a better standard of living and working conditions in their sector of activity.

However, there is no circumventing the fact that, for the time being, the trade unions and the newly created structures in the informal economy lack both the size and resources to consistently defend the material and moral interests of their members. Measures aimed at consolidation, extension and financing have to be taken to ensure the continued development of these still fragile organizations in the informal economy.

However, these few shortcomings should not make us lose sight of the very real existence of these trade unions and associations in the informal economy. After all, this is a key achievement and constitutes a framework for solidarity and mutual assistance serving workers in the informal economy, which itself entails the certainty of a revival of the labour movement in the four countries in question. The decline of trade union membership and the difficulties they face in representing all of a country’s productive forces can be turned around thanks to the determined support of workers from the informal economy.

This will totally change the trade union landscape in these countries, breathe new life into democratic values and revive social consultation based on the renewed potential of unionism. Proof of this has already been seen in the internal changes within the respective union organizations, the transformation of professional associations in the informal economy into trade unions, and the renewed determination of governments to look into the reality of the informal economy.

On 1 May 2001 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, all the informal economy associations paraded alongside the trade unions and expressed common demands to the Government in a show of mutual awareness on the part of workers in both the modern sector and the informal economy of their shared interests in dealing with the globalization of the economy.
In their first decade after gaining political independence, many African countries recorded relatively impressive economic indicators. However, the era of the need to adopt structural adjustment and economic stabilization programmes emerged in the early 1970s when the continent was hard hit by the quadrupling of the oil price in 1973. The 1973 “oil shock” generated an abnormally large current account deficit and reduced the rate of GDP growth. To many analysts, this crisis has been referred to as structural, although there are many causes (both internal and external) which contributed to the situation. The external factors – including repeated droughts, declining trade terms and the growing debt burden – have had a significant impact. Internal factors arising from inappropriate policies, institutional weaknesses, administrative shortcomings, and political instability have also played a major role.

**What are structural adjustment programmes (SAPs)?**

Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) consist of reform policies that combine short-term stabilization measures with longer-term adjustment measures. When and how such policies are implemented depends on the way the structural problems of a particular country have been perceived. Implementation could be sequential or simultaneous.

Adjustment in most economies was necessary. Overspending was common, the civil services were often bloated, big government was the order of the day and there was unnecessary red tape. Usually, the first steps have involved “stabilizing” the economy through fiscal, monetary, wage and exchange rate policies. Owing to their difficulties, most African countries have been compelled to seek support from the Bretton Woods institutions, which are behind the creation of SAPs. SAPs entail freeing the markets of all “distortions” and therefore letting supply and demand forces take control. Diagnosing a country’s structural problems usually brought to the fore weaknesses in the macroeconomic parameters, mainly balance of payments deficits, high inflation, budget deficits and low or negative growth rates. Stabilization measures were therefore seen as the magic pill. The social component was almost always ignored as it was assumed that as long as there was stability, other things would be corrected automatically.

SAPs involved limiting the growth of government budget deficit to levels that can be sustained by foreign and non-inflationary domestic financing, budget rationalization through containing public sector employment, liberalization of...
labour, money and capital markets, and maintenance of an appropriate exchange-rate policy. These objectives normally entailed price reforms, removal of subsidies, foreign exchange and internal and external trade liberalization, introduction of “cost-sharing” for government-supplied services, privatization, restructuring of government institutions, and legal reforms aimed at providing an “enabling environment”.

The effects of adjustment policies

The experience with SAPs in the 1980s in many countries has been mixed. The implementation of SAPs in some countries in Africa has brought to the fore important issues which were not well articulated at the beginning of the programmes. While in some countries the success of these programmes in terms of positive economic growth has been reported, important issues pertaining to the social dimensions of adjustment have made many people concerned about the “true” benefits of the SAPs in relation to the welfare of the majority of the people. For instance, in Zambia in 1987 and in Algeria in 1988, the implementation of adjustment and liberalization policies caused political unrest. A recent report – entitled *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?* – suggests, however, that where countries such as Mozambique and Ghana have made key economic reforms – liberalizing markets and trade, improving economic management and promoting private sector activity – growth and personal incomes have risen and poverty has declined. Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Mauritius, Côte d’Ivoire and Mali have also been cited for certain positive aspects.

Yet, SAPs have led many countries into the debt trap, with debts continuing to soak up a major portion of the least developed countries’ budgets. Poor countries have been compelled to adhere to the conditionalities imposed by the international financial institutions (IFIs). This has often led to more financial haemorrhage from poor countries to rich countries. The massive debts contracted by African countries have created a fiscal crisis that has negatively affected the continent’s economic growth and threatened the sustainability of reforms. Moreover, huge external debt stocks have deterred investment, encouraged capital flight and seriously undermined economic growth and employment.

Besides, the IFIs’ paternalistic approach alienated other stakeholders since they chose to deal with central banks, heads of state and senior officials at the finance ministries. The conditionalities had a number of “moving targets” whose primary focus was not on attacking poverty at the design stages. No wonder many African governments have failed in the past to meet such adjustment and reform conditionalities, especially macroeconomic targets set by the World Bank and the IMF – indeed, in recent years three out of four ESAF programmes (Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility) have broken down because their conditions were too tough to be met. Important parameters determining the effectiveness of the programmes – such as how many jobs would be created, the question of internal corrupt tendencies, governance issues, accountability and the effects of adjustment on fundamental human rights – were largely ignored.

Developing countries were under increasing pressure to offer incentives in order to attract investments, leading to lowering of labour standards, as is the case in Africa’s export processing zones (EPZs), and resulting in a destructive race to the bottom. In the end the beneficiaries have been foreign investors, further compromising African countries’ national sovereignty. Besides, African countries have limited exportable products as they are mainly producers of primary commodities that are particularly vulnerable to large price swings. The focus on open market policies has not produced many positive returns, as African countries still do not have sufficient access to international markets.
A trade union approach to adjustment

The general objective of trade unions – to defend and improve the living standards of their members – has been made increasingly difficult by structural adjustment programmes. Of particular importance has been the degeneration of living standards, job loss and economic recession – caused by the massive devaluation of national currencies, reduced public spending and higher external debt payments – which have led to declining trade union membership. Some governments have argued that social adjustments needed a flexible labour market and have gone to the extent of rewriting labour laws. In some countries, the World Bank is on record as providing “assistance” to effect changes in the labour law, without consulting the International Labour Organization or the ministries responsible for labour, social dialogue and human development issues.

According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the impact of the economic reforms goes beyond macroeconomic factors. A recent ICFTU publication summed up the mood as follows: “The Bretton Woods institutions are not solely responsible for the failure to fulfil their stated mandates to reduce world poverty, promote human development, or assure international financial stability, but they can make no claim of having achieved a system of economic justice in which the entire world community can participate.” Economic reforms have to incorporate democracy and equity into adjustment and development. Trade unions should therefore be involved in the process of developing and implementing SAPs so as to build in the social development aspects and to make sure that short-term economic gains are not regarded as more important than long-term social and sustainable economic development.

The policy of the ICFTU has been to ensure that the international financial institutions and African governments listen to the views of trade unions. On this front, the ICFTU has held meetings with the World Bank and the IMF, in both the international and national arenas. Several International Trade Secretariats (ITS) and ICFTU-affiliated African unions have taken part in these meetings. The World Bank, in its World Development Report 1995, reiterated that “free trade unions are a cornerstone of any effective system of industrial relations … can help raise workplace productivity to reduce workplace discrimination … have contributed to their countries’ political development …”. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also expressed concern about the social dimension of SAPs and demonstrated willingness to meet and discuss its policies with trade unions.

In order to support trade unions in dealing with SAPs, the ICFTU adopted dialogue as the best option towards effecting change in the policies of the Bretton Woods institutions. Several regional and national conferences and meetings on the subject of economic reforms have been organized. These forums had a major impact at both national and international levels in terms of impressing upon governments, the IMF and the World Bank the need to introduce a social dimension into their programmes.

People-centred development:
The core for adjustment

Social dialogue is necessary to build consensus over national social and economic development goals and means of action. There have been calls for the institutionalization of high-level national stakeholder structures in which major economic and social policy issues are articulated and decisions arrived at through consensus and dialogue. Such structures could be instrumental in checking the excesses of corruption, the allocation of tenders, nepotism, and so on. The experience of the National Economic Development and Labour Advisory Council (NEDLAC) of South Africa could be exploited (see the article by Omano Edigheji and Karl Gostner in Labour Education No. 120/2000).
Social development should be pursued simultaneously with economic growth. Sound macroeconomic policies are crucial for sustaining high per capita growth rates because they increase national savings and investment rates and reduce high rates of inflation and financial instability. Economic growth is an important prerequisite for development. But too often it has been pursued by the blunt tools of austerity. The most successful countries will be those with institutions that are able to balance and rebalance constantly the market pressures for flexibility and dynamism with the social pressures for security and dignity. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Action Programme of the World Summit for Social Development, which established a new consensus and pledged to eradicate poverty, promote full and productive employment, and foster social integration to achieve stable, safe and just societies, should be pursued by all.

Efforts to build productive capacity in African countries should be underpinned by strong employment and labour market policies with investments in employment-intensive sectors such as agriculture and infrastructure development and by support measures for enterprise development. Development of infrastructure is essential for enhancing productive assets, expanding markets, and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). A structurally diversified economy is important because it will generate higher levels of income and will be better able to withstand external shocks such as droughts, floods and shifts in the terms of trade. As a result, the chances of breaking out of poverty are greater.

The international community should have the political will to write off or substantially reduce foreign debt. An overhaul of the Highly-Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) is needed, with the aim of quickly making debt relief available and increasing the number of countries eligible for such relief. In this respect, the conditionality for sound macroeconomic fundamentals as required by the Bretton Woods institutions in the HIPC initiative need to be relaxed if the goal of poverty reduction is to be achieved. Effective domestic resource mobilization is also necessary for economic growth and poverty reduction. The goal of closing the savings gap requires a range of action, including measures to stem capital flight and to attract savings held overseas back to African countries. These in turn require reforms to increase the returns on domestic investment and reduce risks.

Growth with redistribution should be pursued. Development requires not only economic activity but also a reduction in the inequality in the distribution of wealth and more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth within and among nations. More resources should be used for social expenditure on education, health, water provision and housing. The development of long-term infrastructure like roads and telephone facilities is another positive move. Military spending should be curbed to a minimum, while at the same time the international community should take part in the peaceful resolution of the many serious internal and international conflicts.

HIV/AIDS is now considered “the most formidable development challenge of our time”. HIV/AIDS is found everywhere in the world, but the hardest hit region is sub-Saharan Africa. Africa is home to 70 per cent of adults and 80 per cent of children living with HIV, and to three-quarters of the people worldwide who have died of AIDS since the epidemic began. In 2000, an estimated 3.8 million people became infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa and 2.4 million people died. What sets HIV/AIDS apart is its impact on development. It undermines five of the foundations of development, namely economic growth, good governance, development of human capital, the investment climate and labour productivity. Deliberate actions should be taken to target awareness campaigns to eliminate the disease; fight the culture of denial of HIV/AIDS; campaign for the provision of low-cost life-saving drugs; and approach
UN institutions such as the ILO, WTO, WIPO and UNAIDS to urge them to commit more resources to programmes related to fighting HIV/AIDS (see also the article by Jacky Delorme, p. 28).

African countries need to make maximum use of regional economic integration in order to escape from economic isolation, expand their markets and sustain export development. Regional integration is one way to help these countries diversify their economies and reverse deindustrialization and marginalization. Regional integration also induces backward and forward links and thus contributes to regional value added. More importantly, regional integration promotes diversification and exports to regional markets that build experience before entering global markets. An integrated market also provides a framework for African countries to cooperate in developing a common infrastructure – such as in financial services, transport and communications – and mechanisms for the joint exploitation of natural resources. The limited size of the market in most African countries means that African countries could greatly raise their growth prospects by increased intra-regional trade. Access to markets in the North should be guaranteed just as there is need for more effective international mechanisms to stabilize prices and to compensate African countries in the event of sudden falls in the value of exports.

The maintenance of peace and security within and among nations, democracy, the rule of law, the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to development, effective, transparent and accountable governance, gender equality, full respect for fundamental principles and rights at work and the rights of migrant workers are some of the essential components in effecting social and people-centred development. Africa needs to take serious steps to eliminate crony capitalism, corruption, monopolies and unsustainable investments.

Conclusions

A turnaround is required in the “Washington-Consensus” if Africa is to take the path towards growth and development. Structural adjustment programmes must incorporate the principles of transparency, consultation, adequate levels of social spending, good governance and responsible financial management. An active involvement of civil society, including trade unions, in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of more socially oriented and long-term policies is a necessary first step. Such policies should include anti-poverty programmes and address issues like primary education and health care, gender equality, social protection, full employment, sound industrial relations, and respect for core labour standards.

Ideally, Africans should devise their own solutions to their own problems. In recent years, consensus has emerged on the essential elements needed to increase growth and couple it with policies that specifically seek to alleviate poverty. In Africa today, accelerated economic performance requires both the better use of existing resources and increased investment. Specifically, macroeconomic reform must continue, particularly efforts to restructure public finance and to open up economies to trade and private investment. But growth will not be sustained unless underpinned by investments in human and social infrastructure, in particular in the rural areas and mindful of the needs of women in Africa. The capacity of African governments to manage their economies effectively must be enhanced.
Everyone must be convinced that development is impossible unless we have genuine democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance.” That is the credo of the six heads of state promoting the “New African Initiative”. They have also announced their determination to see Africa participate “actively” in the global economy and global politics. A glance at the facts, however, gives rise to reservations about the correlation between democratization, economic development and globalization.

There is no doubt that those countries deemed to offer the best investment risks are the same nations that have democratic institutions: Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa lead the way in Africa (see box). These countries feature a higher degree of openness to the rest of the global economy, one example being the 1996 signature of a partnership and free-trade agreement between Pretoria and the European Union (EU). In addition, over the past two years, in several sub-Saharan countries, the quality of democratization has improved in that the freedom of expression and opinion has now taken its place alongside a multi-party system. In Senegal and Ghana, this was a rather fortunate first. The consolidation of democracy in Senegal, combined with greater openness of the market and with progress in the privatization programme, helped improve the rating of this country by investors according to Nord-Sud Export, a specialist French review published by the Le Monde group. Côte d’Ivoire could have followed suit, had it not been for one of the leading political players – in this case Alas-sane Ouattara, a northerner and Muslim – being excluded from the race, and the riots that this unleashed.

However, this should be viewed in perspective. The correlations between democratization and investment are not automatic – far from it. Whatever efforts have been made in certain countries, the dividends of democratization and any progress made in the sound management of public affairs and consolidation of the rule of law have not necessarily resulted in an immediate inflow of foreign capital. The potential of the African markets has been damaged by instability in the terms of trade. For instance, the price of robusta coffee stood at roughly US$470 by metric tons in September 2001, just one eighth of its selling price seven years ago! What is more, a recent World Bank study notes that, over the past 20 years, there has been a net transfer of resources from sub-Saharan Africa to the rest of the world. Foreign direct investment, for its part, plummeted 13 per cent in the year 2000 alone to just 0.4 per cent of global trade, down from 1 per cent in the period 1989-1994.

In addition, it must be admitted that Tunisia, which is considered one of the best “risk countries” in Africa (see box) and has a higher degree of openness to trade following the signature of a partner-
ship and free-trade agreement with the European Union, combines remarkable growth and almost unfailing Western support with repeated human rights violations. One of the champions of free trade and growth in East Africa is Uganda, which enjoys indisputable freedom of expression, albeit limited to the right to criticize. For the rest, Uganda’s “no-party system” does not provide many opportunities for opponents of President Yoweri Museveni, who won the recent presidential election – amidst accusations of irregularities – against the opposition candidate Kizza Besigye.

Conversely, the leading pack of countries with the lowest indicators of human development includes countries that are poorly governed by authoritarian regimes, which are often at war, and which, by rejecting any and all dialogue, have seen growth in the ranks of the armed opposition, greatly benefiting the ruling elites in predator countries. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – where the collapse of the State, poorly governed by a corrupt elite, was the primary cause of the 1997 downfall of the Mobutu regime against its adversaries supported by Rwanda and Uganda – freedoms have taken a major step backwards under the Kabila regime. The international community’s lax attitude in letting foreign armies (from Rwanda, Uganda and Angola) come to the aid of the hurriedly selected rebel leaders and allowing them to take root in this country and trample on freedoms, has created a dangerous feeling of impunity. This has only whetted the appetites of other budding dictators, who are just as inclined to enlist support from foreign predators so that they can play God.

But here too, the correlations are not automatic. Just look at Angola, a country which is also at war but whose main export products – oil and diamonds – had already been integrated into the cogs of the international economy well before “globalization” became a watchword. A disastrous risk for many investors wishing to do business in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, Angola, along with Nigeria, the other “black gold” sponge, soaks up nearly half of foreign investment in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, a large proportion of this manna returns to the industrialized countries in the form of arms purchases and secret investments in

Classification of “risk countries” for investments in 35 African countries

The following classification is based on four parameters (business environment, political risks, market risks and sovereign risks). The risk is deemed prohibitive if below 160 points, very high if below 270 points, high if below 320 points, rather high if below 380 points, moderate if above 430 points and low if above 540 points. For instance, the best risk for investors in emerging countries is Singapore (608) and the worst is Yemen (103). Afghanistan, as well as a number of small markets such as Gambia, are not rated in this table, which covers 100 countries.

| Botswana | 514 | Benin | 380 | Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | 298 |
| Mauritius | 511 | Togo | 376 | Zimbabwe | 284 |
| South Africa | 427 | Kenya | 361 | Congo | 282 |
| Morocco | 426 | Uganda | 330 | Ethiopia | 275 |
| Tunisia | 426 | Madagascar | 330 | Nigeria | 269 |
| Namibia | 421 | Mozambique | 323 | Guinea | 250 |
| Burkina Faso | 407 | Niger | 319 | Sudan | 189 |
| Egypt | 406 | Côte d’Ivoire | 319 | Angola | 156 |
| Senegal | 401 | Chad | 313 | Democratic Republic of the Congo | 105 |
| Gabon | 398 | Algeria | 312 | Botswana | 514 |
| Ghana | 397 | United Republic of Tanzania | 305 | Mauritius | 511 |
| Cameroon | 397 | Mauritania | 298 | South Africa | 427 |
| Mali | 390 | | | Morocco | 426 |

tax havens, all against a backdrop of widespread indifference – and without even a minimum increase in the well-being of the population.

**Lack of democratization + globalization = danger**

There are also cases where the lack of democratization or dialogue encourages perverse effects of globalization. For instance, the way in which genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are being distributed on the continent leaves a great deal to be desired. “While civil society is mobilizing in Europe, America and Asia to engage in a citizens’ debate on the issue of GMOs and intellectual property rights, the opposite can be seen in Africa: no public involvement in decision-making”, lament the conclusions of a pan-African workshop on GMOs held in Yaoundé (Cameroon) in October 1999. In Kenya, “President Moi, who seems to be a permanent fixture, does not leave much room for public opinion. In 1999, local movements unsuccessfully tried to oppose shipments of genetically modified corn from the United States and Canada as food aid for countries ravaged by famine”, adds the French magazine *Politis*.1 After all, while biotechnologies have serious potential, how they are introduced – which includes banning the re-sowing of harvested crops – and the prospects for multiplying crops of plants that include new genes (transgenic varieties of rapeseed) could lead to a total collapse of the market for certain tropical products, a prime example being palm oil. There are also fears that exports to Africa of crops from the North, which have become more productive thanks to GMOs, will rise and weaken the production systems of Africa’s local farmers.

Another type of danger in a country like Zimbabwe is that increasing abuses of power as the economy nosedived (uncontrolled invasion of farms by commandos from President Mugabe’s party, persecution of opposition leaders, ruinous war in the DRC largely paid for by the taxpayers, etc.) are going hand in hand with practices that are having a harmful impact on public finances. One good example of this is the awarding of public procurement contracts. One of the many reasons that international aid to this country has dried up is the privileges awarded to Malaysian companies, whereby they are exempted from having to make transparent bids to win contracts in the energy and telecommunications sectors.

In Nigeria, which has had an elected president and parliament since 1999, globalization is weakening economic and social stability. In September 2001, the inability of local industry to cope with competition from imported products prompted the House of Representatives to set up a special committee to assess the impact of belonging to the World Trade Organization (WTO). There is even a risk that Nigeria could pull out of the WTO, warding off potential investors keen to establish a foothold in the country, and bolstering further the ranks of the unemployed. The country is already gripped by chronic violence perpetrated by criminal organizations – who are using Islam for their political scheming and have imposed the sharia in 13 of the country’s states – and by the equally chronic sabotage of oil facilities by autonomist activities in the delta region.

In a more general vein, the rising awareness that globalization has unfortunately not led to an improvement in the human rights situation is largely responsible for the sea change in Amnesty International’s doctrine. In Dakar in August 2001, the human rights organization decided to broaden its mandate to include economic, cultural and social rights. After all, globalization “has led to riches for some and to decline and despair for many more”, notes former AI Secretary-General Pierre Sané of Senegal.2 His words are echoed by French Cooperation Minister Charles Josselin, who, in a speech on “Africa and the development of the franc zone”, on 25 September 2001, said that “inequality in the world, far from being reduced by globalization, is actually being increased by it”.

25
Inconsistent use of the carrot and stick

For several years, the Europeans, the members of the G8 (the group of the leading industrialized countries plus Russia) and the Bretton Woods institutions have been demonstrating a doctrine that tends to reward, in terms of economic and trade-based support, those countries that best meet the criteria of respect for human rights, the rule of law and the sound management of public affairs. As a result, due to repeated violations of political and trade union rights, a country like Swaziland was not allowed to benefit from the Generalized System of Preferences and the African Growth Opportunity Act, which is opening up the American market to African producers.

In an interview, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, one of the backers of the New African Initiative, clearly states his opinion that the provisions on democracy in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries “should be reinforced” and that “those countries that do not meet certain democratic standards should not be eligible”. Mr. Wade says, in effect, that he fully supports “the setting of democratic conditions” at the risk of not making many friends amongst what is called the “syndicate” of African Heads of State. Addressing the US Congress and French President Jacques Chirac, President Wade called for more serious monitoring of elections. “I’m sorry, but sending in observers the day before the election is just a big joke. I fell victim to it myself. I was the first one to call for outside observers. President Diouf took me at my word. He called some foreign observers. They arrived on Saturday. They visited two or three polling stations. They saw people voting and afterwards they said: ‘Nobody’s dead so everything went really well’. That is no election. Preparations must be made one year in advance: registration on election lists, printing ballots, free expression. Today, I am fighting to have the election process observed, not just the casting of votes! If the absence of dead or wounded becomes our only criterion for fair election, then where are we heading? In 1993, I was naive enough to believe that Africa would enter the new millennium with democratic governments. I expressed my hopes for this by organizing the conference of political parties in 1993. Unfortunately, we have not made it yet, although we have made progress. Nevertheless, there are several governments in Africa whose leaders were elected without dispute. But sadly this is still not the case for the majority of countries.”

Mr. Wade also makes it clear that as far as trade is concerned, the developed world must not build false barriers to exports from his country by misusing health standards to block imports of Senegalese ground nuts or phosphate.

But there can be no denying that the way in which conditions in terms of democracy, human rights and good governance are applied is disconcerting at the very least, and seems to be driven by other parameters. Consistency in European policy is particularly hard to grasp. Togo, for example, has been targeted by sanctions for years because of election fraud and the repression of opposition parties. But Guinea has not been subjected to sanctions, even though Alpha Condé, the rival to President Lansana Konté in the December 1998 elections, was imprisoned for two years. In Central Africa, the World Bank and the European Union have partly reopened the flow of funds to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, even though the record of that country’s regime in violating human rights and freedom of expression, bears no comparison with that of the government of Kengo wa Dondo, Zaire’s Prime Minister from 1994 to 1997. Many political parties are banned and summary executions are commonplace. By the same token, the IMF has tried for years, but in vain, to force the Government in Luanda to open the books of the semi-state-owned company, Sonangol, in order to halt the plundering of oil revenue, which goes missing in the “Bermuda triangle” between Sonangol, Futungo (the presidential palace) and the Banco Nacional de Angola, and ultimately ends up in offshore ac-
counts. It is common knowledge, as demonstrated by the “Angolagate” scandal in France involving arms supplied to Angola, that this money is recycled into tanks and phosphor bombs. However, the EU, its Member States and other donors have all continued sending aid to the Luanda Government. In this case, as with other countries in the region, such as Uganda and Rwanda, it is clear that, in the best-case scenario – as the French Cooperation Minister stated with remarkable clarity – international aid allows these regimes to free up funds for military purposes.

Recently, the international community set itself the mission of attacking the evil of war at the roots by imposing embargoes on arms and fuel shipments and on exports of diamonds by Angola’s UNITA rebels and Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front. But, in October 2001, after three years of this fruitless exercise, the UN experts charged with monitoring the sanctions were forced to admit that they were not effective. It will be noted, however, that the exercise focused on a non-strategic commodity, since the world can get by without African diamonds “of dubious origin” for industrial applications. Moreover, the embargo, which is the absolute antithesis of free trade, unquestionably benefits alternative output from southern Africa, largely controlled by South African mammoth De Beers, and the Canadian Far North, where the “cartel” has invested massively and used sanctions to promote “politically correct” gems. It is also worth noting that the embargo was decreed without even the slightest consultation of Angolan civil society, which finds it pointless and advocates negotiations aimed at ending the war, even though it is finding it very difficult to make itself heard.

Curiously, the sanctions weapon loses its edge if belligerent parties or states guilty of violating human rights happen to harbour large oil reserves. There has never been any question at all of imposing embargoes on Angola, which supplies 8 per cent of American imports of crude oil and which therefore falls within the national interest of the United States. For the same reason, the regime of Nigeria’s General Sani Abacha never had to fear sanctions. As for Sudan, whose army continues to bomb civilians in the South but which is a leading producer of black gold, the UN Security Council has softened its stance, so much so in fact that in October sanctions on Sudan were lifted. The sanctions had initially been imposed in the wake of the attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 1996 in Ethiopia. It is worth pointing out that Sudan has not stinted its efforts to prompt Washington to display a more understanding attitude by hiring the lobbying skills of former CIA employee Milton Bearden, who has been paid more than $200,000 to achieve the lifting of sanctions against Khartoum and re-establish good relations with the United States. According to a survey by Al-Ahram Hebdo (Egypt), other petroleum-producing countries in the Gulf of Guinea, such as Angola and Gabon, have been even more generous, respectively paying $2 million and $1 million a year to public relations agencies and lobbyists. Setting conditions on aid and sanctions may sometimes appear to depend on reasons which the noble professions of faith by political leaders pretend to overlook. However, let us look at the omen formulated by European Development Commissioner Poul Nielson at the meeting in Brussels on 10 October 2001 between the EU Presidency and the backers of the New African Initiative. In Mr. Nielson’s view, the determination of the supporters of the New African Initiative to establish a propitious environment for foreign capital while at the same time meeting standards of law and good governance would make it possible to maximize the impact of the 4-billion euro Investment Facility provided for under the Cotonou Agreement.

Notes
No war in the world is more important. To avoid any misunderstanding it should be pointed out that these warlike words uttered by US Secretary of State Colin Powell date from before the military response to the terrorist attacks perpetrated on 11 September 2001. In fact, the US general said them back in May when he was heading up a mission to several African countries and they refer to the battle against HIV/AIDS, which is ravaging sub-Saharan Africa. In view of the current international crisis, there are fears that his words may end up serving as the epitaph to millions of forgotten victims.

The figures are enough to make your head spin. With the statistics released at the end of 2000 still proving hard to digest – 36 million infected individuals around the world, 25 million in Africa alone; 5.3 million newly infected people, 3 million fatalities, 22 million since the outbreak of the epidemic – UNAIDS is now shaping up to feed us even more catastrophic numbers. Nonetheless, on the basis of the two striking events of the year, the prospects were rather encouraging. Firstly, back in May, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the establishment of a global fund to fight AIDS. Secondly, the Pretoria trial several weeks later saw the rout of pharmaceutical companies that had sought legal action against the South African Government for its failure to respect patents. In the face of increasingly hostile public opinion, they ended up withdrawing their complaint.

Lowering the cost of drugs

Patents, that is what this is all about. The story began back in 1994 with the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the agreements on aspects of trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS) which all its member countries undertook to respect by 2006 at the latest. In theory TRIPS are fine; but in practice they are a front for excesses of all kinds, such as the “patenting” of living organisms which often goes hand in hand with the shameless pillaging of resources in the South by companies based in the North. As far as drugs are concerned, access to various treatments is rendered even more difficult by the de facto monopolies exercised by the major companies and the prohibition of generic copies.

All the same, the WTO has provided for compromises that are integrated into TRIPS. In a nutshell, a country may manufacture generic copies at the lowest possible price “in situations of national emergency or other circumstances of extreme urgency” (Article 31). Several governments are trying to leap into the breach, despite the fierce opposition from pharmaceutical companies, which are crying piracy. It is a clash between two different outlooks: profits and the universal right to health. The United States, where the pharmaceutical lobby is all-powerful, is threatening several countries with economic retaliatory measures. The escalation is both verbal – for example the laboratory of GlaxoSmithKline

AIDS: Prevention and triple therapies - no contraindication for the South

The urgent need to take a variety of global and concerted actions to contain the AIDS pandemic makes the ILO initiatives aimed at combating HIV/AIDS crucially important. However, any such action must include access to anti-AIDS treatments.

Jacky Delorme
Journalist
has been dubbed “Global Serial Killer” by some of its opponents – and legal, with numerous complaints lodged by laboratories for “violating” TRIPS.

So what’s the situation today? In South Africa, anti-AIDS activists, members of international NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans frontières) and Oxfam, associations of persons living with HIV/AIDS, and trade unions, are rapidly growing disillusioned. Following the Pretoria trial, the South African Government announced that it lacks the financial resources to resort to the large-scale production of generic drugs to treat its infected population, which amounts to nearly 5 million persons, a world record. So any initiatives taken will be few and far between.

In the townships on the Cape, Doctors Without Borders has just launched an anti-AIDS programme which includes multi-therapies based on imported generic copies. In May, the mining giant Anglo-American announced that it was negotiating the provision of generic copies of antiretrovirals to care for its HIV-positive staff. Migratory movements and the sex trade which such movements induce mean that mining areas constitute major centres of infection. However, early in October the company back-pedalled, stating that it was unable to provide anti-AIDS treatment for all its infected workers and would have to limit itself to executive staff, a discriminatory move that was immediately condemned by the National Union of Mineworkers, especially since the majority of the company’s managers are white.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Brazil, for which epidemiologists predicted a considerable surge in the numbers of HIV-infected individuals, is containing the scourge. In addition to an aggressive policy of prevention at all levels of society, the Brazilian Government decided, in 1998, to produce the main molecules effective against HIV/AIDS so that it would have the means of providing the latest treatment free to all those who needed it. Today, the country is producing treatments for US$3,000 per patient per year and it seems likely that before long it will succeed in bringing that figure down below the $1,000 barrier, as one Indian manufacturer has already succeeded in doing. Brazil is very far removed from the cost of multi-therapies used in Western countries, where prices range between $10,000 and $15,000 per patient per year. The burden on the social security system remains entirely bearable: there are fewer sick people and fewer deaths linked to HIV/AIDS.

Whether or not multitherapies are taken in hand by the governments of countries in the South, their revolt has somewhat destabilized the pharmaceutical lobby in the West. Competition from generic copies has had a major impact on the current prices proposed by the major laboratories. Their humanitarian marketing of the 1990s, when they contributed to each and every HIV/AIDS summit, no longer fools anybody. While not equivalent to the offers made by manufacturers in the South, the discounts they are currently offering are considerable, giving an idea of the tremendous profits made by this sector of industry and thereby contradicting the argument put forward by the laboratories, that high prices are needed to fund their costly research and development programmes. In fact, public laboratories actually did most of the work involved in discovering molecules that are effective against HIV/AIDS, before leaving the private sector to take up the running and patent these lucrative discoveries.

**Increasing financial resources**

Bearing in mind these price cuts, the creation of an international fund to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria is an important event. The man behind the initiative is UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the fund is to become operational by the end of 2001. The objective is ambitious: US$7 to 10 billion must be collected each year to finance the programmes which will not only cover prevention, but also include treatment for all infected individuals and more strenuous efforts to find a vaccine. According to Kofi Annan, this fund must come from fresh
allocations, rather than from existing resources that would be diverted from their original purpose. National programmes will be the main beneficiaries but they will have to respect guarantees of transparency if they are to prove efficient.

There is no longer any secret as to how these programmes can be made to work. The main lesson learnt over the last 20 years is that AIDS should not merely be considered an epidemic, but also a multidimensional challenge, with social, economic and political impact as well as consequences for compliance with human rights. In the absence of a global response, it will proliferate and become “uncontrollable”, as is the case today in several regions of the world. All too often the battle against AIDS remains fragmented. Yet what it needs is successful coordination among all the parties involved. Sub-Saharan Africa offers a full spectrum of different levels in prevention programmes. Senegal is the shining example of a country that has succeeded in preventing a major HIV/AIDS epidemic by mobilizing all the social players: teachers, employers, trade unionists, tribal chiefs, religious leaders, healers, etc. Uganda is another country often mentioned at international conferences for the remarkable results it has achieved, albeit alas at a later stage, when the epidemic was already firmly established. On the other hand, in Swaziland, one of the three most affected countries in the world, there is a lack of political will. The country does have a national programme, as do most others, but the only really effective action is being taken by a few local associations.

When focusing on the world of work, it is easier to understand both the need for social dialogue and the importance, in that context, of having a reference tool like the ILO’s Code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work. Providing decent work, fighting discrimination against infected individuals, promoting social security systems, ensuring equal treatment of men and women and protecting high-risk groups such as migrants or sex industry workers, are all at the heart of efforts to combat HIV/AIDS.

Prevention is a priority. It is already an extraordinarily efficient tool, but it is not sufficient. In sub-Saharan Africa alone nearly half the population live on less than US$1 per day. For them, buying condoms is not a priority. Nor is changing their habits because they are supposedly “at risk”. Their lives are precarious. Drinking water, electricity and basic educational and health resources are not accessible to them, or at least not readily so. It is illusory to imagine a general mobilization without giving some hope to the disadvantaged sectors of the population and it is cynical to claim to be helping the people affected by HIV/AIDS if this entails preventing them from having access to the drug they so vitally need.

Coupling lower prices for anti-AIDS treatments with the creation of an international fund must make it possible to work out strategies that combine prevention and treatment. The example of Brazil shows that the argument put forward by the major laboratories, namely that multi-therapies are too sophisticated for the overly fragile health systems of the countries in the South, can be dismissed. Of course, such treatments must be available cheaply. In this respect, the ongoing debate in the WTO on a reform of the TRIPS agreements is fundamentally important. As WTO Director-General Mike Moore said in reference to the exemptions: “…the countries must be guaranteed the means to take advantage of this flexibility”. What remains is the nub of the conflict, i.e. money. Even with cheap generic drugs, the formula of prevention and treatment eats up considerable resources, and without international aid it cannot function. So far, the international fund initiated by Kofi Annan is, however, a long way from amassing the expected $7 to 10 billion.

Note

The impact of globalization in Africa and the response of trade unions: The case of South Africa

From a South African trade union perspective, neoliberal-driven globalization is entrenching existing inequalities between regions, nations and the rich and poor, rather than improving the lot of all the world’s citizens. Yet, there is a need for trade unions and civil society to engage critically in the globalization process, and combat its negative aspects.

Shermain Mannah
Education Desk
South African Democratic Teachers Union

In a graphic metaphor, Cuban President Fidel Castro, speaking at the South Summit in April 2000, captured the current reality of globalization for the vast majority: “Globalization is an objective reality underlining the fact that we are all passengers on the same vessel, that is, this planet where we live.” But, he argued, the passengers are “travelling in very different conditions”. Small minorities, he stated, “are travelling in luxurious cabins furnished with the Internet, cell phones and access to global communication networks. They enjoy a nutritional, abundant and balanced diet as well as clean water supplies. They have access to sophisticated medical care and to culture.” In contrast to this, he said, “Overwhelming and hurting majorities are travelling in conditions that resemble the terrible slave trade from Africa to America in our colonial past.” He went on to state that, “85 per cent of the passengers on this ship are crowded together in its filthy hold suffering hunger, disease and helplessness. Obviously, this vessel is carrying too much injustice to remain afloat and it pursues such an irrational and senseless route that it cannot call on a safe port.” He concluded this description with a cautionary note, “This vessel seems destined to crash into an iceberg. If that happened, we would all go down with it.”

According to Mohamed and Vally (Kenton, 1999), it is unlikely that globalization will lead to the development of most of Africa for the following reasons:

- Africa’s low threshold of resources and income.
- World prices and demand for African cash crops (the major earner of foreign currencies) have fallen since the 1960s. In addition, competition from intensive capitalist agriculture in Asia and Latin America has further exacerbated the plight of Africa’s farmers.
- The middle-income countries in Africa derive their wealth mostly from mineral exports, which tend to benefit mainly transnational corporations and developed countries that convert raw material into consumer products. The irony is that they then sell these products back to developing countries for high profits.
- The majority of Africans live in rural areas where the economic cycle is dependent on unpredictable weather conditions.
- The increase in population, together with very limited employment opportunities result in a rapidly growing landless labour force, which ekes out
an existence on the margins of the economy. This also leads to high levels of migration towards middle-income countries such as South Africa.

- Notwithstanding the call for an African Renaissance, global capital finds few opportunities for new investments in the continent – reflecting political instability and negative perceptions in the market place.
- In the information age, Africa is poorly placed to compete on an international level due to its lack of new technology and adequate education provision.

The authors conclude, “The prognosis is that Africa’s development and the dynamics of global capitalism, or globalism generally are not convergent and will not be in the foreseeable future.”

A new and deadly enemy now stalks Africa – HIV/AIDS. None of Africa’s earlier challenges have been as daunting or as catastrophic as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Disease spreads within a context of poverty, ignorance and subordination of women and children. Much of Africa lies paralysed by the shackles of poverty, caused by a history of colonialism, misrule and the continued exploitation of the multinational corporations, supported by the major international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Globalization hampers the developing world’s response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the following ways:

- Multinational pharmaceutical companies retain control over research, the supply and pricing of drugs and medicines.
- Embracing neoliberal philosophy, governments are reluctant to take full responsibility for public health. This is increasingly clear in South Africa, one of the best resourced countries in Africa.
- The low level of national resources and income and lack of infrastructure – the results of years of colonialism and underdevelopment.

Hence there is a need for civil society and trade unions to take the lead in pressuring governments to urgently address the pandemic (see the article by Jacky Delorme, p. 28).

Education and globalization

When defining our vision for education in Africa we must be guided by the following principles and conventions:

- The right to education is laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- The principle of social justice, which is closely bound to the objectives of education.
- Education in particular is tied to the remedial principle that requires it to work towards compensating for inequalities of birth and social conditions.
- An education and training system can only be judged to be fair if it is inclusive.

However, lack of resources and current neoliberal economic policy have prevented the realization of these principles in education. The bare statistics for educational provision in the sub-Saharan region as captured by David Johnson in the South African Mail and Guardian emphasise the enormous challenge facing the developing world.

- “Eleven percent of the world’s population live in sub-Saharan Africa, but receive only 1 percent of the global expenditure on education, whereas the 21 percent of the world’s population who live in the developed world receive 84 percent of the global expenditure on education.
- Forty million children of school-going age in sub-Saharan Africa do not attend school, fewer than one third progress to secondary education, and only 3 percent receive any form of tertiary education. By comparison, formal
education in the developed world last 15 to 17 years, nearly 100 percent of children in the developed world receive a secondary education, and more than 50 percent tertiary education.

- A child in sub-Saharan Africa has on average $49 spent on her/his education, whereas $4,636 is the average education expenditure for a child in the industrialized countries.

- Since 1994, western aid for sub-Saharan Africa has been reduced by $3.7 billion, and African governments have transferred four times more to northern creditors in debt repayment than they have spent on health and education."²

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank’s structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) for African countries have contributed to crippling debt. In addition, high interest rates and rising oil prices continue to exacerbate the situation and paralyse development. This severely curtails the capacity to deliver social services and public education for all in Africa.

Globalization has seen the ascendency of neoliberal economic theory, which includes the notion of a reduced role for the State and the reduction of public spending. This doctrine is supported by the arguments that public spending “crowds out” private initiative and that private provision is more efficient. The result, however, is more and more to shift the responsibility of financing public education from the State to individuals. In the African context, where the majority of the communities are desperately poor, the result is the stagnation or near collapse of public education.

The extension of WTO and GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) regulations to cover issues of intellectual property and education services further threatens public education, especially in developing countries. There is a real risk that public provision of education – especially higher education and vocational education – will be turned over to private providers. The implications include the homogenization and commercialization of education, the undermining of national and local cultures and languages, and unemployment for educators in the affected sectors.

**South Africa**

South Africa differs from sub-Saharan Africa in certain ways. The South African economy is more diversified, operates at a higher level of industrialization and plays a more pronounced role in the global economy as compared to the rest of the continent. As a consequence, a democratically elected government in South Africa accepts the hypothesis of the “incorporation of Africa into global capitalism under new, more favourable conditions via the South African connection”.

The South African Government’s acceptance of neoliberal macroeconomic policy in the form of GEAR (Growth Employment and Redistribution policy), which is market driven and supports an export-competitive strategy, has been likened to a form of self-imposed structural adjustment. In this sense, South Africa exhibits broad similarities to those sub-Saharan countries that adopted structural adjustment policies in the 1980s. This is clearly evidenced by the financial pressures experienced by the public sector since 1994.

GEAR promotes the marketization of education, public–private partnership, fiscal austerity, budgetary constraints, cost-containment and cuts in education. Schooling is now differentiated less by “race” than by “class” as a result of the user-fee model and market competition between schools. Parents now bear much of the costs of education and the State seems to be shedding its responsibility for the provision of education and transferring it to school governing bodies, further increasing funding by parents. The stratification of schooling in South Africa is similar to patterns of schooling at a global level. Policy in South Africa views education and training as a key determinant of long-term economic performance and
income redistribution. However, the Government seeks to achieve these objectives within the context of its neoliberal economic policy. This has resulted in education being increasingly commodified rather than seen as a right or a common good.

Education budgets have fallen in real terms between 1996 and 2000, resulting in a maintenance budget – with nothing left over for genuine transformation. South Africa, newly liberated from the shackles of apartheid, has been unable to address the worst inequalities which continue to plague its public education system. Indeed, after seven years of democracy, South Africa remains – after Brazil – the most unequal society in the world.

The further consequences of GEAR for education include the following:

- the rationalization of colleges which has led to retrenchment and demotion of staff;
- further threats of retrenchment in teaching and non-professional staff across all sectors of education;
- proposals for the employment of unqualified staff in teaching in the schooling sector. This is already being implemented in other parts of Africa, for example, in Senegal;
- attempts to reduce collective bargaining rights and proposed decentralization and fragmentation of bargaining units in the public service;
- poor infrastructure in public schools, coupled with lack of learning materials and teaching resources;
- the imposition of school fees, tending to further marginalize the poor and act as an exclusionary tool to keep the disadvantaged out of well-maintained schools in middle class areas;
- universities are outsourcing many of their services due to financial pressure in higher education and government is encouraging private sector partnerships. This inevitably leads to reduced labour standards, employment insecurity and “casualization”. The same process has been proposed for support service in the public schooling system; and
- increasing fees in higher education results in student debt and the exclusion of less privileged students from the system.

In education, there is a crisis in terms of non-delivery on the expectations aroused by democratization in 1994. This manifests itself in disillusionment and conflict within the tripartite alliance (alliance between the African National Congress, South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions). Once again, trade unions and organs of civil society are leading campaigns to make the government more accountable and to demand, among other issues, improved education and social provision.

The role played by trade unions

At an international level, education unions meeting at the Education International (EI) Third World Congress (Thailand, 2001) have come out strongly and clearly against the introduction of market mechanisms in education, stating that “our schools are too important to be left to the market”. EI has launched a campaign against GATS aimed at stopping the WTO from adding education to a long list of services which are to be opened up for market competition and commercialization. EI is pooling its research capacity with other organizations such as Public Services International (PSI) to monitor and challenge privatization in the education sector.

Massive retrenchments and outsourcing break down large scale concentration of employment where traditional unions have been based and find their power. The effect of globalization is to atomize resistance, seeing workers and communities as either consumers or individuals – never as a collective. Therefore one of the most effective ways of taking on globalization is for organized labour to develop links with other sectors of civil society in order to
build strong alliances. This is analogous to the social unionism movement of the 1980s. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in the 1980s was a prime example of this kind of collaborative approach. This was based upon an alliance of labour, communities, student and political organizations with an agenda that went beyond traditional trade union issues to include the democratization and radical transformation of society.

Similar alliances are now being formed in post-apartheid South Africa. Examples of this include COSATU’s Anti-Privatization Campaign. In a show of solidarity non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other organs of civil society and workers from all sectors recently downed tools in a national two-day protest against the government’s proposals for privatization of “parastatals” and sections of the public service. The anti-privatization campaigns are part of an international movement of unions and civil society which is fundamentally opposed to the privatization of public services such as education, health, water, telecommunications and electricity. Privatization of these basic services is the offspring of neoliberal philosophy and WTO and IMF policies.

To state another example of trade union response to the pressures occasioned by neoliberal economic theory, SANGOCO (the South African NGO coalition), the churches and COSATU jointly embarked this year on a programme to draw up a “Peoples Budget”. The “Peoples Budget” prioritizes social needs including public education. This alternative budget process will be repeated annually to coincide with the release of the Government’s annual budget.

Earlier this year, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) forged a powerful coalition with COSATU and international organizations such as Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam to take on the multinational pharmaceutical giants. This led the Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Association to drop its lawsuit against the South African Government and its Medicines and Substance Control Act of 1997. TAC’s activist base and COSATU’s massive worker base together went beyond the objective of a show of strength in numbers, to include awareness-raising campaigns and education for grass-roots participants.

The TAC/COSATU campaign is a critical case study because it drew on key sectors within civil society to challenge the power of huge corporate interests with global reach and massive resources. It illustrates that it is possible to isolate and take on aspects of globalization that are deemed harmful. In respect of the court case, the alliance included government and international organizations. Recently TAC was joined by some of the churches in jointly calling upon government to declare HIV/AIDS a national emergency and to devote necessary resources to ensure access to treatment for people living with AIDS and rape victims.

The fight against HIV/AIDS is a working class issue and part of the struggle against the globalization of capital. In future, HIV/AIDS will become part of negotiations for trade unions and will be a key policy platform of any political party endorsed by the labour movement. In South Africa, COSATU has become one of the major players in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The last COSATU National Congress (2000) witnessed the first major difference within the tripartite alliance with the federation challenging the state president’s questioning of the link between HIV and AIDS. AIDS activists view this as having undermined education and prevention programmes.

Issues for negotiations with employers, now include:
- anti-discrimination;
- right to privacy;
- access to medical aid and a provident fund;
- death benefits;
- increased allocations for HIV/AIDS research and medication.

On the education side, HIV/AIDS impacts on the country’s ability to deliver
quality public education in the following ways:

- the reduction in the supply of experienced teachers;
- an increase in the number of AIDS orphans;
- an increase in the number of teenagers infected with the virus;
- chronic absenteeism amongst teachers and learners, especially in cases where learners have to be kept out of school to take on the role of caregivers for infected family members or to take on the role of breadwinners; and
- high levels of learner drop-out where families cannot afford to pay school fees due to reduced household income as a result of the death of a breadwinner.

This negative impact undermines key goals in the Education For All framework—that education provision be inclusive. In South Africa, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) has played a crucial role with government and other key stakeholders in developing and implementing anti-discriminatory HIV/AIDS policy for learners and educators. SADTU has gone one step further in conducting research on the impact of the pandemic on its membership, the findings of which will guide its response to the pandemic in the education sector.

The constraints imposed by globalisation and neoliberalism require the mobilization of a multi-strategy and multi-sectoral approach to effectively fight HIV/AIDS. In the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) region EI, together with other international partners, galvanized teacher unions and health and education ministries to develop collaborative projects to implement EI World Congress resolutions and the recommendations emanating out of the Global Health Conference. In South Africa, SADTU is spearheading the EI/WHO collaborative project with the Ministries of Health and Education.

One of the positive aspects of globalization has been the encouragement of democratization and transparent government. In Africa, and especially southern Africa, unions are playing an important role in sustaining this. Currently in Swaziland and Zimbabwe, trade unions are at the forefront of pro-democracy protests. In recent history, trade unions in Zambia and South Africa have been the leading forces for democracy.

Debt, the legacy of unequal trade relation and colonialism remains a major drain on African economies. In the case of South Africa it is a debt incurred by the oppressive racist apartheid regime that now has to be serviced to the detriment of South Africa’s poor. International campaigns for debt relief, such as Jubilee 2000, have attracted support from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The final resolution of the World Conference Against Racism points to a greater understanding of and agreement on the origins of debt and underdevelopment and the need for the world community to address these issues.

At UNESCO’s World Education Forum, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, a number of objectives for the basic provision of education were set. These were not achieved. At the second conference held in Dakar last year, the following targets were set:

- All states will be requested to develop or strengthen existing national plans by 2002.
- Gender disparities in primary and secondary education will be eliminated by 2005 and gender equality in education will be achieved by 2015.
- By 2015, all children, especially those at risk, should have access to and complete free, high-quality compulsory primary education.
- By 2015, a 50 per cent improvement should be achieved in levels of adult literacy and equitable access to basic and continuing education for adults.

To avoid a repeat of the record of non-performance by governments, the Global
Campaign for Education was launched as a strategic alliance with EI, Oxfam international, Action-Aid, PSI and many others. The main objective is to hold governments accountable for the undertaking made in Jomtien and Dakar and to ensure that by 2015 quality public education is available to all.

Globalization also raises gender issues. In order to fully appreciate the relationship between globalization and gender, a thorough understanding of the links between women’s economic position, gender oppression and the new world economic order is required. It is crucial for unions to develop a gender approach to their work.

For example, those countries, mainly in the South, whose competitive edge is still derived from cheap labour, are still attempting to attract foreign business by offering lax environmental and health laws. This has been especially true over the last two decades in the export processing zones (EPZs), where up to 80 per cent of the workforce is female. The competitive advantage of these countries is essentially based on the socio-economic and political disadvantage of women. This raises the issue of how organized labour relates to sectors like workers in EPZs, informal sector workers and sellers, casual workers, homeworkers, domestic workers and farmworkers. These organizational challenges have to be addressed in order for unions to remain a viable force in society.

Conclusion

Africa has not coped with the new global world order. South Africa is battling to embrace the new order as a subregional power, but again results have not been promising. In the meantime, the dreams of transforming and expanding social services and educational provision are on hold as budgets barely maintain present levels. This situation has led to a growing divide between government and the privileged on one side and working class communities, the growing ranks of the unemployed and marginalized people on the other. This manifests itself, for example, in land invasions, protests against cutting public utilities and resurgent trade union militancy. In this context, unions and organs of civil society have come together to resist the most negative aspects of neoliberal policy and to pressure the Government to deliver on the promises of 1994. In such a situation, which is replicated throughout the world and especially in developing countries, trade unions and progressive organizations need to embrace new communication and information technologies to learn from each other’s experiences and to coordinate international programmes to combat the negative aspects of globalization.

Notes

1 N. Mahomed and S. Vally: “Education and Globalization”, keynote address (Kenton, 1999).

African press and globalization:
An unfinished transformation

The emergence of independent media has undoubtedly contributed to the strengthening of democracy in Africa. But economic fragility, attacks on journalists, illiteracy and the digital divide continue to hamper its development.

Jean-Paul Marthoz*
European Press Director
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Newspapers are piling up in the makeshift kiosks of Bamako and Dar es Salaam. Looking at the variety of headlines, one might forget that in the decades that followed independence, the African press was characterized, with a few notable and intermittent exceptions – such as Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Senegal – by an almost total submission to the State. In the name of an unfortunate concept of “development journalism”, the written and audiovisual press mainly engaged in so-called “griotism” – the celebration of the “achievements” of the Head of State – conveniently leaving out reports on corruption, arbitrary decisions and violence.

News about Africa came from the international press, which placed the odd correspondent in pivotal cities like Dakar, Abidjan, Nairobi and Johannesburg, and which regularly dispatched special correspondents to the region, most often by replicating the traditional flows of colonial history. The religious press also had its network and its special reports were a precious source of information and analysis. The subjugation of the African press also explains the key role played by magazines published back in the former colonial powers: Jeune Afrique and Afrique Asie in Paris, and New African in London. The international radio stations – BBC, RFI, Deutsche Welle and Voice of America – rounded off this “African” media system, serving for the most part as sources of substitute and even opposition information for African audiences.

In the late 1980s, the winds of freedom sweeping across the communist countries spread to Africa and, little by little, led to the birth of newspapers, followed by radio stations that did not have ties to the government. The Windhoek conference, organized by UNESCO in 1991, sanctioned and validated this paradigm shift. The final declaration of the conference, proclaiming the role of an “independent, pluralistic and free” press in the advancement of democracy and development, became the benchmark for all new press ventures in Africa. In West Africa, the Paris-based Panos Institute noted in 1994 that “the mushrooming of an independent press played a crucial role in the advent of political pluralism. The state-sponsored press, goaded by these developments, cast off some of its shackles too. Once the elections were over, these newspapers continued to pursue an unheard-of, ongoing, pluralistic public debate.” At the same time, in South Africa, the struggle against apartheid made it into the alternative press – Weekly Mail, New Vision – while the

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French-speaking countries of West Africa were experiencing a proliferation of “irreverent” titles such as *Le Cafard Libéré* in Senegal and *Le Messager* in Cameroon. In English-speaking countries, the misadventures of the press reflected the nature of the transitions under way – gentle in Ghana and the United Republic of Tanzania, complex in Nigeria and Kenya. In still other countries, some of the new media became caught up in ethnic and identity-based sensationalism, leading ultimately to the deadly phenomenon of the “hate media”, of which *Radio Télévision des Mille Collines* in Rwanda became the frightening symbol during the genocide in 1994.

Ten years after the Declaration of Windhoek, there are wildly varying assessments of the liberation of the African press. “In most countries, liberating the press has undeniably led to the creation of a new public space and a new sense of empowerment”, says Marie-Soleil Frère, an expert in the role of the African press in political transition. “The press legitimized criticism and helped the people to be less afraid to speak their minds. Legislation has been reformed and professional structures have been bolstered by setting up Press Houses (in Ghana and Burkina Faso) and Free Press Observatories (in Côte d’Ivoire).”

Internationally, the African press has also joined many non-governmental networks aimed at promoting cooperation and solidarity, from the UJAO/WAJA (West African Journalists Association) to MISA (Media Institute of Southern Africa). Moreover, it has enjoyed the support of multiple Western, i.e. American and European, sponsors keen to promote the idea that freedom of the press is also a lever in equitable development.

However, the African press still has a long way to go before its transformation is complete. First of all, the printed press remains mainly limited to urban areas and is still the preserve of the wealthiest segments of the population, owing to its cost and the fact that it is usually written in the “official languages” (French, English, Portuguese) inherited from the colonists. In many countries, liberalization has stopped at the doors of radio and television. Despite access to satellite TV and international radio broadcasts, certain African governments are still trying, albeit with less and less success, to retain their grip on radio – the only African mass media – and especially on TV.

With the exception of some highly professional concerns, centred around the Nation Group in Kenya, a few press groups in Lagos and Johannesburg, Groupe Sud in Dakar and Fraternité-Matin in Côte d’Ivoire, the printed press in Africa remains extremely fragile. Most titles suffer from multiple ills: a lack of transparency regarding their funding, focus on the director/editor-in-chief, no job specialization, poor training, politicization focusing on local figures, etc.

Above all, the African press suffers from a tough economic environment. The lack of investment and equipment, the limitations of the advertising market and tenacious illiteracy are all creating a highly precarious environment for titles and explain the “corruptibility” of poorly paid journalists and the frequent acquiescence of editors to political groups and financial interests.

In most countries, the press is also subject to repression. The law is constantly used to harass the free press, with the result that those newspapers that “do the most stirring” are continually intimidated. Former colonial law on the crimes of sedition and insulting the Head of State, and extremely tough legislation on slander and confidentiality are regularly invoked to bring journalists to court or put them in jail. For instance, in Zambia the *Post* was sued for slander on more than 100 occasions between 1991 and 1996.

“At the end of the day,” says Robert Ménard, Director of Reporters without Borders (*Reporters sans frontières*), “the number of people going to prison is a good sign. Whereas far more journalists are in prison in Africa today than was the case 10 or 20 years ago, this is because there are journalists to throw in jail, journalists who are doing their job. Fifteen years ago, in
certain African countries, there was nobody to throw in jail because there was only one newspaper, only one press agency, only one radio station and only one TV station”.3

In countries at war, the situation of journalists is even more precarious. Forced to choose sides between government forces and rebels, in most cases they are unable to do their job. Assassination is the ultimate form of censorship. In recent years, lists published by international human rights organizations have shown that African countries such as Algeria, Rwanda and Sierra Leone have had the ignominious distinction of leading the pack in terms of the highest numbers of murdered journalists.

These conflict situations also complicate the very job of keeping the public informed: “The Congolese press, which could have been a key eyewitness to events, was totally absent from the theatre of war”, said the Congolese organization Journalistes en Danger in the introduction to its 2000 report on freedom of the press in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). “It makes do with official press releases and second-hand information. Of course, the Congolese press does not have extensive resources available for travelling to the sites of operations, but the main thing is that it has been cowed. It is banned from viewing what is going on and even from talking about it, often to the detriment of the country. This is true in the East and West. When it does dare to speak out, it is accused of treason.”

Africa and the world

The existence of independent media and a generation of journalists keen to do their jobs in a professional manner have certainly helped to improve the quality of the international coverage of the continent. Today, texts published in the most independent newspapers regularly appear in international magazines such as Le Courrier International and World Press Review.

We are a far cry from the “lapdog press” in the days of the single-party states and, therefore, a far cry from opaque government. But it is still difficult to “unscramble” information. “Those who live outside Africa”, says Africa expert Stephen Ellis, “can find plenty of information in the African press but, like the press in every other country, it can only be read within the context of the dominant culture if we wish to extract from it the maximum amount of information”.4

The African press is the victim of its own political, cultural and financial constraints and limitations. Despite the liveliness of a press – which is private, if not always independent – crucial events are still covered first by the international press and then picked up by the African press. This was the case, for instance, during the Senegalese army’s intervention in Guinea-Bissau, and with the Tanzanian press during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.5

The advent of new information and communication technologies (the Internet and especially mobile telephones) have also changed the situation, not only by giving African journalists global sources of information, but also by enabling the appropriation of information citizens and non-governmental associations. These technologies also allow African journalists to go beyond their usual readership and reach audiences of fellow nationals living abroad as well as researchers and decision-makers. According to the Department of African Studies at Columbia University in New York, more than 120 African newspapers and magazines can be accessed on the Web.6

Despite the faster-than-planned growth of the Internet in Africa, the figures are still modest compared to countries in the North. In 2001, there were just 5 million people surfing the Web (out of a total population of 780 million), chiefly due to the lack of phone lines, the low level of electrification and the high cost of buying a computer.7 (See also the article by Marc Bélanger, p. 31).

There is still a certain amount of inequality as far as information is concerned in Africa. In fact, there are several “Africas”. The main imbalance is between the Republic of South Africa and the rest
of the continent. South African capital has been heavily invested in the continent’s telecommunications and television sectors, one example being M-Net, the first pan-African channel. South Africa accounts for more than two-thirds of African cybersurfers, and even though the end of the struggle against apartheid has diminished the level of interest in South Africa, Johannesburg remains one of the continent’s capitals of journalism, especially for the English-language press. Along with this continental imbalance there are sub-regional differences. This is the case in West Africa, where Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire play a special role in terms of French-language reporting.

Globally, international radio stations stand out clearly from global TV stations. The global TV stations provide relatively little coverage of Africa, and when they do it is usually dramatic (war, AIDS) or official (news from humanitarian organizations or organizations sponsored by them). Radio stations, on the other hand, provide a steady stream of information in line with relevant local journalistic criteria. Even though they face competition in a growing number of countries from local private radio stations, international stations still benefit from their clout among the more educated strata of the population because they validate locally obtained information from abroad.

However, Africa still remains a relatively low priority in news reports broadcast or published in the countries of the North. The type of subjects covered is also conventional: despite occasional efforts to show that Africa is alive, getting by and being creative, most reports cover tragic events; indeed wars, predatory manoeuvres, pandemics and refugees are the steady diet fed to us in reports on Africa. In addition, despite the new technologies (satellite telephones and the Internet), the information available on vast regions of Africa is fragmented. Access to battlefields and zones ravaged by humanitarian crises is often prohibited by militias or gangs. The quality of reports on Africa is also limited by the lack of knowledge of the historical and cultural complexity of African societies. This phenomenon is fuelling stereotypes and generalizations about this continent that has once again turned towards “the heart of darkness”.

Globalization and pluralism

Despite the progress made over the last ten years in the news and the media, Africa is still typified by an “unequal exchange” of information. The revival of Panapress, the continent-wide press agency, is part of this desire to reduce the imbalance and to give Africans the chance to cover their own continent. But Africa is also widely faced with the repercussion of media globalization. “The media are accelerating the globalization of African societies by introducing the political, economic, social and even cultural modes of the Western industrialized countries,” says André-Jean Tudesq, an expert on African media. “The triumph of the market economy … coincided with challenges to leaders in many African countries and the expression of new aspirations … . But the media – and television in particular – also portrays the life of modern, richer societies, leading to comparisons, frustration and demands that become more violent as the quality of life of many groups of Africans deteriorates owing to various crises”.

How can African cultural diversity be protected from the onslaught of Western media invading the programming schedules of TV stations that are often penniless and devoid of any resources to produce their own content? “Africans see the rest of the world, including other African countries, through Western eyes”, Tudesq concludes.

Notes


The brain drain: Losing one’s head

Almost one-third of Africa’s intellectual resources now lie elsewhere, at a time when the continent is in dire need of them. This challenge is bound up with both the development strategies and employment policy. The brain drain must be reversed, but in itself it will not be enough.

Last year, Mr Rossi, a senior representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), noted that “each year between 1960 and 1975 some 1,800 highly qualified Africans left the continent. This figure rose to 4,000 for the period 1975-1984 and to 12,000 by 1990 and currently stands at 23,000. This means that around one third of Africa’s intellectual resources now live elsewhere.”¹ He added that these figures do not include the students who fail to return home after they have completed their education. In a similar vein, 2.7 per cent of Indian graduates now reside in industrialized countries. The same applies to 3 per cent of Chinese graduates; the figure for Egypt is 7 per cent; for South Africa it is 8 per cent; for the Philippines 10 per cent; the Republic of Korea 15 per cent; Iran 25 per cent; and Ghana 26 per cent. In the case of Jamaica, 77 per cent of graduates live in the most industrialized nations.² “These flows are extensive enough to constitute a real ‘brain drain’.”³

This brain drain takes two main forms.⁴ The first is the result of the magnetic attraction of training centres in industrialized nations to students from developing countries. The declared intentions are praiseworthy: young people will be trained and then take their new skills back home. But in reality the situation is rather different. Many graduates are deterred from returning home by the difficult living conditions that await them there. As a result they stay abroad for good or at least put off their “return home” for as long as possible.

The other aspect of the brain drain phenomenon is the pulling power of Northern countries for skilled technicians, university researchers and already trained intellectuals. This highly selective method of recruitment is based on the difference (or even the gulf) between working conditions in the country of origin and those in the potential host country. Private firms, international institutions or even universities may be behind this, with or without the collusion of the Northern states.

Trade in goods...

The trade union organizations essentially view this phenomenon as reducing labour to the status of goods. Hence, the French daily newspaper Libération noted on 28 February 2000 that: “Germany will import 30,000 IT experts”, using the same term that is employed for animals and objects. Other organizations are concerned about the effects that this form of migration is having on development: the IOM noted: “Human resources in Africa constitute the basis of national wealth. The continent absolutely has to hold on to them and create the necessary conditions for the return of those intellectuals who may have left.”

As far as Africa is concerned, migrations still follow the old colonial lines. France, Belgium, Portugal and the United

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Kingdom are all continuing to receive immigrants respectively from West Africa, the Great Lakes region, Angola, Mozambique and other Portuguese-speaking territories, as well as eastern and southern Africa. However, the distinction is now starting to blur somewhat as a result of the creation in Europe of the so-called Schengen zone and the increase in the number of illegal immigrants who enter the European Union wherever and however they can. Nor can we overlook the attraction of North America and, of course, intra-African migration. There is nothing new about the brain drain phenomenon. However, there have been two notable changes in recent years. First of all, the number of people involved has risen. Secondly, the improvement in communication techniques has resulted in some movement in the opposite direction. Work that used to be done in the industrialized nations using trained immigrant labour has now been relocated to the countries that originally supplied that labour. The IT skills of Indian engineers have been widely documented; but it is perhaps less well known that, unbeknown to the customer, calls to certain companies are now automatically deviated to call centres in countries of the South. The operators there are trained to speak without an accent and are required to monitor European weather and football results in order to be able to respond coherently to any remarks made by the customer. However, this mainly concerns an unskilled or only marginally skilled workforce.

**Individuals and societies**

As with any form of migration, the brain drain can be viewed from an individual or a collective point of view. At the individual level, a researcher or an engineer recruited by a company, an institution or a university to work in an industrialized country will probably secure better pay and better working conditions. As for all other migrant workers, he/she will also have the option of sending money back home to his/her family, thereby helping to improve their living conditions. According to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), “the global volume of remittances (repatriated wages) rose from US$2 billion to $70 billion between 1970 and 1995”. In the best-case scenario, the money earned abroad will be invested in job-creation initiatives. Collectively, however, migration represents a short-term gain and a long-term loss for the country of origin. This is not only true for the brain drain but applies to all migrant workers.

In the short term, migration generates cash thanks to the money sent back home by the immigrants in question. On occasion, this source of income has even outstripped export revenues. In fact, some countries have even banked on this influx of capital. Thus, as OECD expert Mario Cervantes points out: “In the 1960s, India chose to develop its higher technological research institutes rather than primary education. A veritable private training industry for export developed, as also happened in the Philippines. One of the leading applicants for US immigration visas for highly skilled labour is an Indian agency specializing in emigration.”

However, at the end of the day, says the IOM, “this represents an economic loss. The migratory flows organized by the countries in the North completely eat away any investments made in training.” Firstly, there are the “brains”: although they have benefited greatly from the rare training infrastructures available in the developing country, when the time comes for them to pay back their country’s investment they instead opt to ply their trade elsewhere. Secondly, there are those forms of migration which, as the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) notes, “involve the most dynamic, the youngest and the best (or least badly) trained workers; their loss is a serious blow to their respective countries of origin”. Indeed, the Indian minister for information technology has asked openly why it is that a poor country like his “is subsidizing the American educational system and economy”.

48
Good for companies

For the industrialized countries, too, migration can be viewed in both a positive and negative light. On the one hand, one minus is that public opinion tends to note, perhaps too hastily, the presence of “foreigners, different people, who do not share our culture…”. People forget that the whole of human history is made up of migrations, the coming together and intermingling of cultures.

Another negative point is that the use of migrant workers is exerting downward pressure on wages and working conditions. Simple application of the law of supply and demand should see wages rise when there are labour shortages in a given segment. This mechanism is disrupted, however, when foreign workers are brought in and there is even the risk of a labour surplus, increasing the competition between workers. It is the trade unions’ job to avoid this pitfall and to fight to ensure that all workers, migrant and indigenous, are accorded the same status.

This phenomenon affects all immigrants and shows clearly that while, individually, these workers do see an improvement in their living conditions, overall the recipient countries are the biggest beneficiaries of migration. Evidence of this lies in the debates on the “need” for industrialized Western nations to open their borders to migrant workers in order to compensate for the ageing of the active population.5 As an extension of this, the idea has been mooted of making highly selective calls on migrant labour in line with the specific needs and interests of the host country, or even of using migrant workers for limited periods only.

The brain drain tallies perfectly with this approach in so far as it constitutes highly specific, almost individual selection.

Can we bank on immigrants returning home?

Consequently, we may need to examine the feasibility of voluntary policies encouraging “brains” to return home. This approach is recommended in bilateral agreements between countries and by institutions such as the International Organization for Migration, which has set up voluntary return programmes in a number of countries. How effective have these efforts been?

Former Radio Nederland journalist Roland Ramamonjy told the Agence Syfia that in Madagascar “they do not fully appreciate intellectuals, whereas local engineers are highly sought-after elsewhere for their expertise”. Many are tempted away by the lure of cash. Some resist, some return home. Roland Ramamonjy explains: “I took part in the temporary brain drain by only working three to six months in the Netherlands, France and Canada. I could have stayed there, but my sense of patriotism was too strong.”

Sometimes the social status of the ex-émigré is enhanced when he returns home,

A brain drain tax?

Is it possible to tax the brain drain? Two consultants at the McKinsey Institute in Washington feel that such a tax – redistributed to those companies in the countries of origin who can hold on to their “brains” or lure them back home – could certainly help to counter the losses currently experienced by developing nations. India alone is estimated to lose out on US$2 billion a year as 100,000 IT experts move to the United States of America. However, the working and research conditions as well as the salaries on offer are still far from sufficient to keep these people at home. According to the Financial Times, the authors of the study themselves recognize that there is little chance of such a taxation mechanism really working. The tax would have to be levied in the destination country where the “brain” goes to work, i.e. in the industrialized nations, and it is simply not in these countries’ interests to agree to this.

Source: InfoSud/Switzerland.
but he can just as easily be viewed as a failure: “Whether or not they were driven out, those who return home are called Parisian Rejects and are mocked endlessly. The ‘reject’ will do anything to cast off this shame ... He is then called an ‘abetela’, a play on words suggesting that he is a ‘finished man’.”

The relationship between return and development is not automatic. It needs to be examined in greater detail if only to ensure that these programmes are not, at the end of the day, simply used by the industrialized nations to get rid of immigrants who are no longer useful to them. The first factor determining whether or not returning migrants succeed is the availability of jobs in their country of origin. The second factor is the reduction of the wage gap with industrialized nations, because until this gap is reduced the temptation to leave will always be there. For example, while the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has made it easier to invest in Mexico, it has not managed to stem the tide of migration to the North precisely because this wage gap still exists.

The problem must therefore be viewed in terms of making development a condition rather than a consequence of the brain drain reversal. Many analyses and trade union demands take the same view, calling for economic choices to be driven by the needs of local populations; structural adjustment programmes that limit countries’ room for manoeuvre to be scrapped; and integration into the global economy to be viewed as a means for development rather than an end in itself.

Contrary to what the Bretton Woods institutions appear to believe, the fight against poverty cannot simply entail “helping” the victims of this scourge through social welfare mechanisms which fail to fight the root cause of the problem. It is only through viable and generalized employment policies which respect international labour standards that the causes of poverty can be eradicated.

The brain drain has international repercussions and constitutes a challenge at national level. It is related to the issue of intellectual property in so far as the current trend for concentrating patents in the countries and companies of the North will further deprive developing nations of the necessary means of research. Because of its links with employment and social development policy, this issue is also of concern to the trade unions.

Notes

1 Speaking at a colloquium organized by Agence InfoSud, Brussels, 8 December 2000.
4 One day we may also be writing an article about the “foot drain” as high-level sportsmen and women who go to work abroad end up in dire straits at the end of their careers. But that’s another story ...
8 These discussions have intensified since the (controversial) publication in 2000 of a report by the United Nations Population Division on demographic forecasts: Replacement migration: Is it a solution to a declining and ageing population?