

prevent or resolve it. For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls. They have been crucial in preserving social order when communities have collapsed." His words would ring true in Africa, where recovery is not just a matter of changing economic policies, signing treaties, or making loans. It must take into account that because of conflict, or disease, or the bitter impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which themselves have fallen hard on women in particular, many communities have more or less collapsed and the social order is overwhelmed.

Poverty, as the NEPAD documentation shows, is increasing in Africa, and it has to be recognized that the majority of the poor are women. The World Bank and other international financial institutions have made clear the necessity of popular participation in the elaboration of required poverty reduction strategies, but this participation has so far been too little encouraged, or facilitated, in Africa.

In September 1999, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund announced that all their loan programmes targeting the 80 poorest countries in the world, including many in Africa, would thereafter be based on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Whilst maintaining that the underlying conditions for reducing poverty remain "budgetary restraint, macro-economic stability and economic growth", the Bank and the Fund now recognise that it is also necessary to protect the weakest from the negative impact of these economic reforms and to help all sectors of society benefit from them.

The Bank and the Fund now claim to promote consultation with civil society in the formulation of development strategies, and ask the national public authorities to work with unions to assess the level of poverty of a country, define the poverty reduction targets and set up specifically-funded policy programmes. These claims, however, are all too frequently borne out in practice.

Whilst this may encourage the unions in Africa to get involved in the PRSPs, they will remain concerned about the continuing gulf between the objectives of combatting poverty and the macro-economic stability targets of the PRSPs.

Despite their new-found insistence on the participation of citizens in fighting poverty, the international financial institutions have not yet significantly altered the poverty-exacerbating macro-economic conditions that unions and civil society worldwide have suffered from and challenged strongly, and they are in continuing to impose, under a new name, the traditional elements of SAPs, instruments which were supposedly abandoned after, as President Wade of Senegal said, failing to achieve what was needed.

We are convinced that ***every effort must be made to ensure that African peoples can, through their civil society organizations in addition to representation by government, participate fully in discussions of NEPAD*** and the conditions under which "partnership" with G-8 countries are concretized on the ground in Africa.