OPEN SOCIETY NEWS

SOROS FOUNDATIONS NETWORK NEWS
SUMMER | 2001

Africa:
Casting Ballots Before Bullets

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SOROS FOUNDATIONS NETWORK

Open Society News

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COVER PHOTO
Electoral Institute for Southern Africa
Voting in Malawi, 1999

The numerous nonprofit foundations established by the philanthropist George Soros are linked together in an informal network called the Soros foundations network. At the heart of this network are regional, national, and local foundations that operate in more than 50 countries worldwide. These foundations share the common mission of supporting the development and maintenance of open society. To this end, they operate and support an array of initiatives in educational, social, and legal reform. *Open Society News*, published by the Open Society Institute in New York, reports on the programs and grantees of the foundations in the network. For additional information, see the Soros foundations network website at www.soros.org or contact the Open Society Institute, 400 West 59th Street, New York, NY 10019, USA; TEL (212) 548-0600; FAX (212) 548-4679; or E-MAIL wkramer@sorosny.org

ISSN # 1706-9606

www.soros.org

EDITOR'S NOTE

The United Nations, at a special session on HIV/AIDS in June, warned that the disease was spreading rapidly in Russia, Central Asia, and South America. But it also urged the world to provide greater assistance to Africa, which lies at the heart of the epidemic. The countries of Africa and the outside world must strive to combat HIV/AIDS. Otherwise, moves to develop open, democratic societies will come under threat. And the continent will be all the more vulnerable to violent, demagogic alternatives.

This issue of *OSN* on Africa provides examples of programs that are empowering people to confront immediate problems such as HIV/AIDS and violence as well as build enduring communities and institutions. Whether it is Nigerian women learning preventative measures to avoid HIV/AIDS or South Africans coming together to build their own housing, the stories in this issue illustrate the Soros network's role in encouraging people throughout Africa to improve their lives and strengthen their communities through legal, democratic processes. Following years of turmoil, these activities are a welcome move toward meaningful change.

Yet the challenges facing Africa remain substantial. There must be careful consideration of which policies will enable long-term solutions. In addition to describing programs, this issue features several authors who examine the policies dealing with conflict resolution, press freedom, electoral reform, and economic development in Africa today. While these analyses may prompt debate, the contrast of long-term policy questions with grassroots activities aims to generate thoughtful commentary and provide a sense of the possibilities for building open societies in Africa.

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Promoting Durable Change in Africa

Government troops heading for battle, Sierra Leone

> "The Soros network is responding to social, political, and economic factors that have contributed to the proliferation of war and crime, an absence of the rule of law, an increase in human rights abuses, and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS."

KIM BRICE
OSI REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFRICA

In the past few years, the Soros foundations network has become increasingly engaged in Africa as many of its countries pursue democratization led by numerous and often dynamic civil society organizations. Yet these organizations often lack the resources to produce significant improvements without outside funding and assistance.

The Soros network's first foundation, the Open Society Foundation for South Africa, was established in 1993 as the apartheid regime crumbled and the country's transition to democracy began. In 1998, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) expanded the network's scope of activity to nine other countries spanning most of the territory north of the Limpopo River. Last year, the newest foundation was established, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), covering the 16 member countries of the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS).

The issues facing the Soros foundations and initiatives in Africa are fluid, colossal, and complex. The Soros network is attempting to combat poverty, corruption, tyranny, ignorance, and intolerance. These social, political, and economic factors have contributed to the proliferation of war and crime, an absence of the rule of law, an increase in human rights abuses, and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS.

The Soros network is also operating in a crowded democracy-building arena that has seen very few dividends for the amount of human and financial resources that the international community and Africans themselves have expended on the issue.

Although current democratization and transition efforts in Africa appear to be increasingly driven by new practices such as regular multiparty elections and the establishment of democratic institutions, they also continue to be strongly influenced by traditional relationships based on ethnicity, special interests, sexism, and nepotism.

OSI is uniquely poised to further explore and understand these dynamics. The Initiatives and Foundation represent a diversity of views, opinions, and experiences, and provide a rare forum in which people can regularly meet to try resolving complex social and political issues. Appropriate and durable interventions supported by the Soros network in Africa often may be small, localized, experimental, and even unorthodox.

In South Africa, for example, the Foundation has contributed to the emergence and development of community radio. These small, local stations provide a vehicle for self-expression by mostly disenfranchised communities in languages and formats that are meaningful to their needs. The Foundation also supports innovative responses to violent crime by communities and the judicial system.

OSISA, in addition to its support for human rights efforts, independent media, and education, has identified language as an issue that deserves substantial and immediate attention. OSISA seeks to open debate about the development of language policies acknowledging that the monopoly of colonial languages in government, media, and education has helped maintain African societies in a state of ignorance and underdevelopment.

OSIWA is currently engaging with government and civil society organizations in Sierra Leone and Ghana to establish truth and reconciliation commissions and to try to integrate them into the traditional structures and systems that already exist and operate in these societies.

From health education to protect young Nigerian women against abuse and HIV/AIDS to microcredits to include small entrepreneurs in the continent's development, the programs and ideas in the following pages are bringing change at a smaller and more local scale than past development and democracy-building activities. Some may be applied to other countries and regions, others may not. Yet, unless the international community supports and encourages ordinary African women, men, and youth to participate in their country's political, social, and economic systems, meaningful and lasting change may never occur.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Soros network activities in Africa, visit the Open Society Foundation for South Africa at www.osf.org.za, the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa at osisainfo@osiafrica.org, and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa at osiwa@osiwaabuja.org

Community Radio Liberates

Community radio supported by OSI in South Africa has done much to provide information to communities, foster grassroots democracy, and promote reconciliation. In the following article, Bill Siemering of the OSI Network Media Program describes the development of community radio in South Africa and recent broadcasting and programming efforts in Western Africa. ■

BILL SIEMERING

Several years ago, in a dusty village north of Pretoria, a group of women learned the techniques of using a microphone and tape recorder. After producing short, radio-style features, they said, "We can do this! We thought just men could do this, but now we know how." Inspired by this experience, the women became the operators of Moutse Community Radio.

Initially, the odds of success for stations like Moutse Community Radio seemed slim: newly started local stations to serve the disadvantaged would have inexperienced staff and would operate in a highly charged political environment with no government grants. And, after all, if public radio in the wealthy United States needed government support, what chance would stations in South Africa have?

Less than seven years later, 35 community stations are on the air in South Africa and most are sustainable and providing an important service to their communities. How did this happen?

In South Africa, the idea of using radio to "give a voice to the voiceless" had broad support within the liberation struggle. Following the collapse of the apartheid system, licensing community radio was a high priority for the new government, which established the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) in 1994. In the belief that community radio would best serve the democratic process, the IBA granted licenses to community stations before issuing them to private broadcasters.

The growth of community radio was furthered by the Open Society Foundation for South Africa, the lead donor providing grants for planning and development, training, equipment, and program production.

Community radio stations began the daunting process of establishing themselves by drafting clear mission statements that would serve as guiding stars. The mission statement of Radio Zibonele, which sits in a truck container on a vast sandy plain near Cape Town in Khayelitsha, states: "Our concern is to enhance the quality of life through improving the health standards of our people." By "health" they mean the physical, environmental, educational, and cultural life of the 700,000 people in the community Radio Zibonele serves. The station has one of the largest community radio listenerships in South Africa and is self-supporting through advertising. In Xhosa "Zibonele" means "see for yourself" and self-help is the underlying theme.

"No one is going to come down from heaven to help us," says station manager Vusi Tshose. Instead, the radio station has brought listeners together to solve common problems by sponsoring clean-up campaigns, tree plantings, health awareness activities, and cultural celebrations. When rival taxi associations were in violent conflict, the station invited them to state their cases and ask the community how they wanted them to operate. Tshose even mediated a dispute that prevented a school strike. While much of this was done off air, the station's focus on local concerns helped establish it as a neutral arbiter in community affairs.

Throughout South Africa, community radio stations are playing a significant role in developing democracy. Before each of the country's last two elections, the National Community Radio Forum, working with OSI's Media Program, organized election coverage training for staff at 50 radio stations. They also produced a comprehensive manual for stations that had never before covered local elections.

While community radio in other African countries has yet to achieve the broad popular support found in South Africa, it is growing rapidly and

African Voices

Learning interviewing skills, South Africa

taking many forms. Poverty and high rates of illiteracy make radio the continent's cheapest and most accessible source of information. In the past, national radio stations in Africa have often been used for government propaganda or by extremists to incite ethnic hatred. The development of community radio offers a potent alternative to this abuse and is increasingly important in creating civil society throughout Africa.

In Burundi, the Search for Common Ground, a conflict prevention NGO supported by OSI, sponsors Studio Ijambo, which fosters understanding between Tutsis and Hutus. [See sidebar.]

OSI is also working with the Search for Common Ground Talking Drum Studio (TDS) in Sierra Leone to develop programming for radio stations in the countryside where there is only 10 percent literacy. With nearly one-third of the country in rebel hands, TDS produces programs with former rebels appealing to their old colleagues to turn in their arms and come in from the bush. As people in Sierra Leone try to live with perpetrators of violence against family members and reintegrate disarmed rebels into society, TDS produces programs that foster reconciliation and prevent violence.

Under the direction of Andrew Kromah, KISS-FM in the Sierra Leone provincial capital of Bo regularly uncovers corruption. Using the name "Mr. Owl," KISS-FM investigative journalists have exposed relief workers selling food meant for internally displaced people; a sanitation truck used to dredge for diamonds; a civil militia leader who abused his wives; and an incompetent magistrate who repeatedly set a criminal free. Although OSI sponsored a trip to the U.S. so Kromah could learn more about public radio, his work shows we could learn much from him.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about community radio in South Africa, visit www.soros.org/safrica/sa_radio.html. For case studies on community radio, visit www.comminit.com.

STUDIO IJAMBO:
Hutu and Tutsi Dialogue on Air

Pierre-Claver Niyonkuru was brought up in Kinama, one of the poorest areas of Bujumbura, Burundi's capital. In March this year, the Forces Nationales de Liberation (FNL), one of Burundi's two main rebel groups, launched an attack on the city, took over Kinama, and held it for two weeks. Among the 50,000 people who fled were Pierre-Claver's mother, father, four sisters, one brother and four friends (three of whom were Tutsi). They all stayed in the small room which Pierre-Claver rents near the center of the city.

His landlord and neighbors were less than happy about this sudden influx of people from the predominantly Hutu neighborhood of Kinama and regarded them as potential rebels. Tension increased further when FNL rebels in Kinama attacked a predominantly Tutsi neighborhood.

As one of the producers of Studio Ijambo's phone-in youth program *Ijambo Ry'Unwaruka* (Youth Talk), Pierre-Claver wanted to reduce the misconceptions and fear on both sides. He visited people who had fled Kinama at a local center and invited some of them to appear on his program. One told him that the youth shouldn't fight in the conflict because it only benefited politicians.

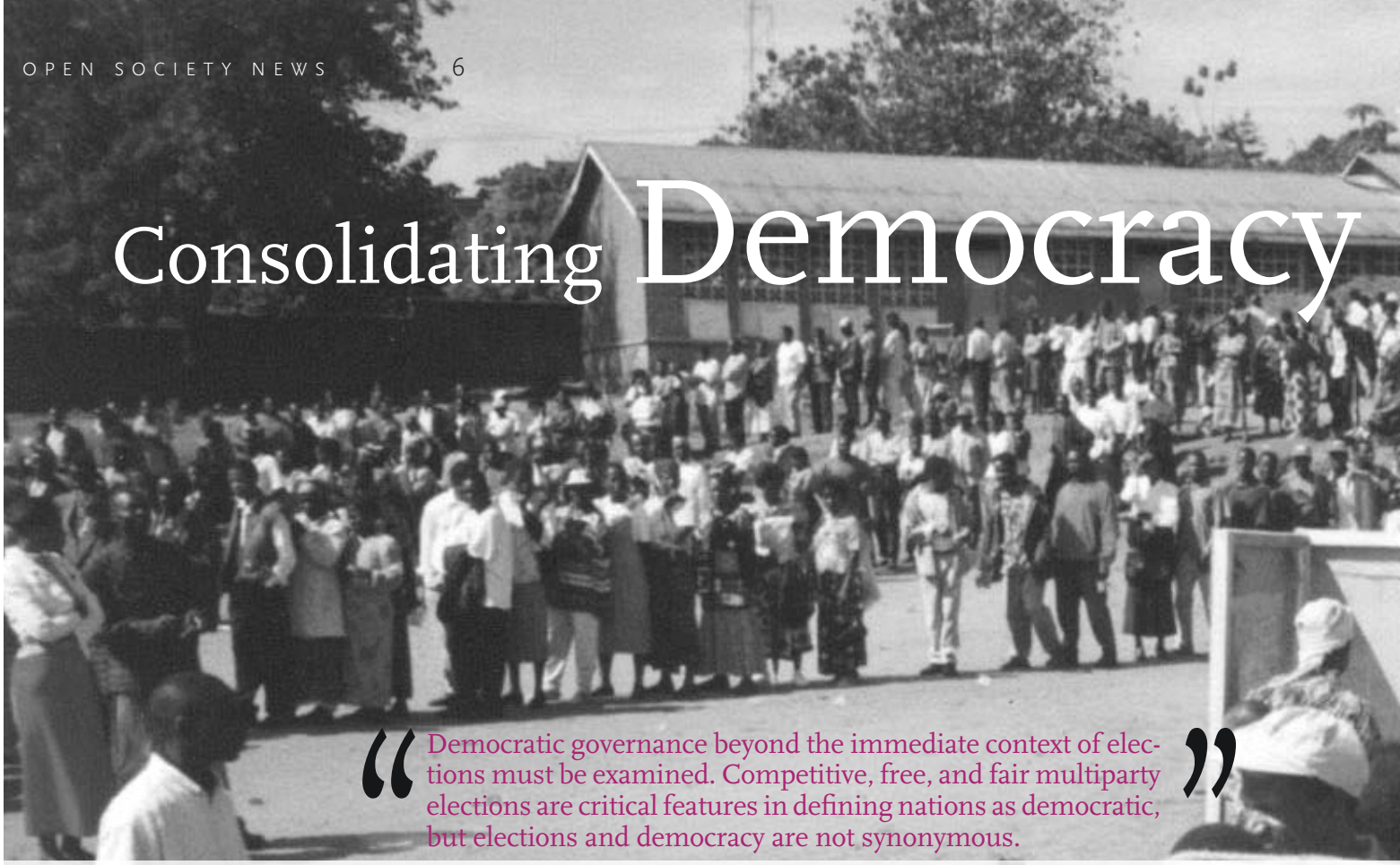
Pierre-Claver then visited friends and acquaintances in the city and invited two, a Hutu and a Tutsi who completely disagreed with each other, onto the show. As Pierre-Claver facilitated the discussion, they soon realized that both groups have the same problems. Both ethnicities fear each other, both had to flee and live as refugees, and both had their houses destroyed by the FNL and the army. Among those who phoned in after the discussion was a Hutu family from Kinama who had been welcomed in by Tutsi friends in Ngagara.

Another person phoned in to say, "No matter what they do, we're all going to have to talk to each other at some time, so it's useless to continue fighting. It would be better to start talking now."

Pierre-Claver says, "Programs like this have made Studio Ijambo's name, no one else has dared to make such programs. We are able and willing to talk to everyone, and that helps us to reduce our own prejudices."

— Francis Rolt, Director, Studio Ijambo

Consolidating Democracy



> "Democratic governance beyond the immediate context of elections must be examined. Competitive, free, and fair multiparty elections are critical features in defining nations as democratic, but elections and democracy are not synonymous."

Many countries in Southern Africa are holding elections and moving forward with democratic transitions. Dren Nupen, director of the Electoral Institute for Southern Africa (EISA), examines the relationship between elections and the extent of democratic consolidation in the region. ■

DREN NUPEN

By the end of the 1990s, almost all the 14 countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) had held their second democratic elections. As a result, attention has begun to shift from democratic transition to issues related to democratic consolidation within the subregion.

Government officials, observers, and academics are placing much emphasis on free and fair elections and the creation of environments conducive to legitimate and credible elections. The international standards to assess whether an election is free and fair include provisions such as the right to register to vote, equal access to the polling station, the unrestricted right to vote in secret, the right to campaign for election, and the right to run as a candidate.

While much attention has been paid to evaluating whether elections are free and fair, aspects of democratic governance beyond the immediate context of elections must also be examined. Competitive, free, and fair multiparty elections are critical features in defining nations as democratic, but elections and democracy are not synonymous.

Gender issues have not been considered sufficiently. Research in South Africa and other countries in the region indicates that women do not always participate in elections on an equal basis with men. Women make up 51.1 percent of Southern Africa's total population, yet account for only 18.4 percent of the representatives in SADC member parliaments. While this is somewhat better than the world average of slightly less than 14 percent, most countries in the region, with the exception of Mozambique, are set to fall far short of the SADC's target of 30 percent female representation by 2005. In Malawi, female representatives comprised just 8.3 percent of parliament in 1999, and in Mauritius, only four of 33 female candidates won seats in the 2000 elections. These figures indicate that any assessment of democratic consolidation in the region must consider international norms of free and fair elections, but also evaluate gender parity and how women are included in the electoral process.

The inner workings of political parties in the region also require scrutiny. Political parties may compete in open elections, but the parties themselves are not necessarily democratic. There are numerous "democratic" parties that slam the door on nominating women and marginalize challengers to the party hierarchy. In Tanzania, the Political Parties Act (1992) makes no mention of efforts to ensure that women stand as candidates or maintain

in Southern Africa

Voting in Zimbabwe

any presence in political parties. In addition, the Electoral Law is silent on sexual harassment of candidates during the campaigns and women hesitate to run because they are more likely to suffer such abuse. A candidate from the National League for Democracy (NLD) party complained that the campaign process was difficult and that she had expected financial assistance from her party. Funds and support, however, were not forthcoming. As she was financially incapable of organizing a public rally, she was forced to conduct a door-to-door campaign.

Elections and the consolidation of democratic governance also continue to be marred by conflict in the region. Civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the return of war in Angola following unsuccessful elections in 1992 have undermined the democratization process in these countries. Swaziland banned political parties in 1973, although some party activity has been tolerated over the last 10 years. In 1998, a SADC regional peacekeeping force had to restore order in Lesotho when elections there were followed by civil unrest. Political turmoil, the invasion of commercial farms by war veterans, and violence in the aftermath of Zimbabwe's 2000 run-up elections and constitutional negotiations have seriously threatened the country's stability. These countries are a reminder of the need for democratic reform and how far off democratic consolidation is for some states in the region.

There are signs, however, that other countries are achieving stability and moving toward various degrees of democratic consolidation. South Africa has developed extensive conflict management processes to deal with disputes as they arise. Some SADC countries have established conflict management committees at the national and community level. SADC members are also working to formulate electoral system models to encourage representation and accountability, and political pressure is being applied by members to states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo where the conditions for the conduct of legitimate and credible electoral processes are not evident.

The determinants of free and fair elections are an issue that requires revisiting and should reflect the conditions of countries in the region and not necessarily fulfil the expectations of Western Europe and the developed countries. Assessments of how free and fair elections really are must examine the participation of women in the political process, the maintenance of the rule of law, and the administration of cost-effective elections that consider the economic and political conditions of specific countries and the financial sustainability of the process beyond donor support.

In this sense most countries remain in transition at every phase of the democratic process. This is not to say that any given democratic practice is equal to all others. Rather, it is to acknowledge that elections and democratic processes must be evaluated in light of the work of others and must remain open to change.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For information about EISA, visit www.eisa.org.za. For resources on electoral reform in the SADC, visit www.sadc-ecf.org.

Pearl and Ifeyinwa, two GPI graduates who help young mothers return to school, Benin City, Nigeria

Girl Power: Asserting Sexual Rights in Nigeria

Young women throughout Africa are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Bene Madunagu, co-coordinator and board chair of the Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) in Nigeria, and Laurel Schreck of the International Women's Health Coalition describe how GPI helps young women protect themselves and improve their lives. ■

BENE MADUNAGU WITH LAUREL SCHRECK

Tina, a 17-year-old Nigerian, recently helped a former classmate gain a little more control over her life. Her friend, age 16, had already been forced to leave school after becoming pregnant. In Nigeria, as in many African nations, it is typical for a girl's education to end because of pregnancy or marriage.

Tina's friend, wanting to avoid a second pregnancy, planned to take an herbal potion. Tina suggested condoms instead, and explained their use and how they protect against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Together the two young women then went to a market stall, where Tina helped her friend purchase her first box of condoms.

For young Nigerian women like Tina and her friend, buying condoms and learning how to use them are crucial steps they can take to protect and empower themselves.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with over 113 million inhabitants, of which 27 million are adolescents. More than 83 percent of the women from this young population have had sex by the age of 20. And with early sexual activity comes the risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS is one of the greatest threats to adolescents in Africa, particularly young women. Gender differentials in rates of HIV infection are extreme; young women aged 15-19 in Africa are two to six times as likely as young men their age to become infected. In Nigeria, about 5 percent of young women are infected, compared with 2 to 3 percent of young men.

These risks can be reduced, however. Tina got her information about condoms and women's health from the Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), which receives technical and financial support from the International Women's Health Coalition, an Open Society Institute grantee. In addition to helping girls protect themselves against HIV/AIDS, GPI also addresses the biological, psychological, social, economic, and cultural aspects of sexuality. The information and skills that the Initiative provides help girls exercise more control over when they get married, negotiate mutually respectful and responsible relationships, and develop the confidence to protect themselves and challenge traditional practices.

One such practice is female genital mutilation. In Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, control of female sexuality and fertility is sought through female

GPI staff meeting, Calabar, Nigeria

> “Nigeria’s strong age hierarchy makes it difficult for most girls to rebuff the sexual advances of older men. If an older man asks a young girl into his car or home, a GPI girl will have learned to ask why. She might also ask how the man would feel if his daughter encountered a similar situation.”

genital mutilation. The extent of the practice in Nigeria is unknown, but 130 million women are believed to be affected worldwide.

“When I was supposed to undergo the process, I told my mother, ‘No, I can’t do this because it is bad for my reproductive health,’” said Amelia, a 16-year-old GPI participant. “I gave her some facts, and she sided with me. I also stopped them from doing it to my younger sister, who is now in GPI.”

GPI held its first classes in July 1994, for nine girls in Calabar in southeast Nigeria and for six girls in Benin City in the southwestern part of the country. Currently, more than 1,800 girls in Nigeria participate in the Initiative at the two original centers and in 28 schools across four states.

As GPI has grown, it has continually had to overcome resistance and respond to concerns from parents. Like many parents elsewhere, they fear that sexuality education programs will lead their children to engage in sex, rather than offer them the information and skills they need to make responsible choices. GPI addresses these concerns by holding community forums, where staff carefully describe what the program aims to achieve. Staff members emphasize the importance of building strong young women, who are “assertive, not aggressive.” They also reassure parents by explaining how GPI helps girls to safeguard themselves by providing, for example, information about how to avoid situations where they might be in danger of rape. GPI’s newsletter and radio show also increase support for the program and extend its reach.

During weekend “checking-in” sessions, Amelia, Tina, and other GPI participants share their experiences and discuss alternative approaches to situations they have encountered. These exchanges help girls challenge traditions such as Nigeria’s strong age hierarchy, which makes it difficult for girls to rebuff the sexual advances of older men. If an older man asks a young girl into his car or home, a GPI girl will have learned to ask why. She might also ask how the man would feel if his daughter encountered a similar situation.

Because GPI cannot reach all of Nigeria’s teens, its staff collaborates with other nongovernmental organizations to build their capacity. NGOs located in other states may send staff to serve as interns, and GPI’s training manual is used extensively both inside and outside Nigeria. GPI also seeks to influence policy and has successfully lobbied for laws banning female genital mutilation in three states.

Much of the recent debate on a global strategy to control HIV/AIDS has concentrated on life-extending treatments. Preventive programs like GPI, however, are also fundamental because they reduce risks for young women and make a long-term investment in adolescents. By giving girls information about health and sexuality and the skills to protect themselves and challenge pervasive inequalities, GPI is changing attitudes and behavior and helping shape a more hopeful future for Africa’s young women.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about GPI and the IWHC, visit www.electroniccommunity.org and www.iwhc.org.

Speaking Truth About Truth Commissions

ROSA EHRENREICH

In the newly emerged field of "transitional justice," truth commissions are an increasingly popular device for trying to heal societies scarred by ethnic and political violence. One 2000 study concludes that at least 21 truth commissions have already completed their work in countries around the world. Unlike individualized prosecutions, truth commissions can appear to offer a cheap, fast, participatory way for a society to come to terms with a legacy of past wrongs.

When the search for "truth" is coupled with the promise of "reconciliation," the idea can seem even more compelling. The recent and well-publicized South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which operated with the blessing of Nelson Mandela and under the guidance of Nobel laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu, helped further popularize and legitimize the concept of truth commissions. Today, countries from Indonesia to Serbia and Ghana are initiating truth commissions.

But are truth commissions all they're cracked up to be? While a well-designed, well-resourced truth commission can in some circumstances play a critical role in ending impunity and bringing about a lasting peace, other truth commissions may have little impact. In some cases, truth commissions may exacerbate tensions, worsen conflicts, or ultimately undermine the idea of the rule of law by allowing perpetrators to go unpunished.

Indeed, when it comes to truth commissions, there are often more myths than truths. Here are three of the most common myths about truth commissions:

1. THEY FIND THE TRUTH. Sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had an enormous budget, subpoena power, and the ability to grant amnesties to perpetrators who otherwise faced a real chance of ending up in jail. As a result, the South African TRC did unearth many sordid truths. But other truth commissions have had minimal resources and little ability to compel testimony or the production of key evidence. At times, still-powerful perpetrators have done their best to intimidate witnesses or commission staff. In such cases, truth commissions may accomplish little—at worst, they may end up, wittingly or unwittingly, papering over serious abuses.

As journalist Michael Ignatieff ruefully noted, truth commissions don't necessarily find "the truth." What they can do, at best, is "narrow the range of permissable lies." Of course, this is not a trivial accomplishment. Simply arriving at a widely accepted and credible account of what happened under repressive regimes that specialized in lies and disinformation can sometimes go a long way toward ensuring that past abuses won't recur.

2. FINDING THE TRUTH WILL PROMOTE HEALING FOR THE VICTIMS, ATONEMENT BY THE PERPETRATORS, AND RECONCILIATION FOR ALL. Some victims do report that they were able to come to peace with what happened to them or to their loved ones when their suffering was publicly acknowledged. The occasional televised images from South Africa of perpetrators and victims weeping and embracing each other offer moving testimony to the possibility of genuine atonement and forgiveness.

Nonetheless, people handle trauma in different ways: some victims want to see perpetrators punished, and some perpetrators acknowledge their crimes without a trace of remorse. For some, truth commissions may dig up old hurts and raise tensions—even provoke violent backlashes. In Rwanda, a truth commission did nothing to prevent the 1994 genocide. In Sierra Leone, the 1998 Lome Peace Accord granted amnesty to the Rebel United Front (RUF) (famed for hacking off the limbs of civilian victims) and provided for the creation of a TRC. Sierra Leone's parliament passed legislation to set up a TRC in February 2000, but by May 2000, the RUF

Reconciliation billboard, Sierra Leone

> When it comes to truth commissions, one size does not fit all. What kind of truth commission will work best—and whether a truth commission is appropriate at all—will depend very much on a given society's unique circumstances.

had returned to the battlefront and taken hundreds of UN peacekeepers hostage. Even in South Africa, one carefully executed public opinion poll found that race relations actually deteriorated as a result of the TRC.

3. TRUTH COMMISSIONS PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY. There can be little doubt that truth commissions in some countries have helped promote accountability. Although the truth commission that operated in Argentina after that country's "dirty war" faced formidable obstacles, its findings ultimately paved the way for several prosecutions. In Chile, a truth commission report was initially ignored by most perpetrators, but the evidence the commission gathered later fueled prosecutions of Pinochet, first in Spain and ultimately in Chile.

Nonetheless, much of the time, truth commissions have traded the pursuit of justice for the pursuit of "truth" and "reconciliation." In El Salvador, a UN-administered truth commission did lead to the removal of many senior military officials from their positions—but they were retired with full military honors. In Nigeria, televised truth commissions have provided a popular form of entertainment, but few harbor hopes that anyone will end up in court. In Indonesia, government promises to prosecute human rights abusers in conjunction with a TRC remain largely unfulfilled.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

As more and more countries look to truth commissions to address past wrongs and promote peace and reconciliation, donors will be inclined to provide financial and technical support.

The desire to support truth commissions is understandable, but donors should not regard them as a panacea. Badly designed truth commissions can, in some situations, do as much harm as good. Truth commissions can founder when the public has unduly high expectations about justice, compensation, or reconciliation. They can also founder when powerful players ignore or try to undermine them.

Designers and supporters of truth commissions must face tough questions about what issues and time frames a truth commission should cover, and whether the TRC should have subpoena power, the ability to name individual perpetrators, the ability to recommend prosecution or amnesty, and the ability to recommend compensation for victims. Commissioners need to be chosen through a credible process, a budget and structure must be developed, funds must be raised, and competent staff must be hired. Difficult decisions must be made about how to take testimony, what kinds of hearings to hold, how to involve the public, the media, and key stakeholders. In many cases, a witness protection scheme must be designed to protect witnesses from intimidation by perpetrators.

When it comes to truth commissions, one size does not fit all. What kind of truth commission will work best—and whether a truth commission is appropriate at all—will depend very much on a given society's unique circumstances. How widespread and serious were past abuses? Were they largely restricted to a political elite, as in Ghana, or did they ultimately involve genocide, with hundreds of thousands of victims and many thousands of perpetrators, as in Rwanda? Were the abuses hidden, or were they widely known? Does the court system function efficiently and independently? Are prosecutions an option? Is renewed civil war, or a coup, likely? Can commissioners operate without fear of retaliation? Can the government afford to set up a truth commission, pay compensation to victims, and overhaul many government agencies in response to recommendations from a truth commission?

Three-year-old victim of rebel amputation, Sierra Leone

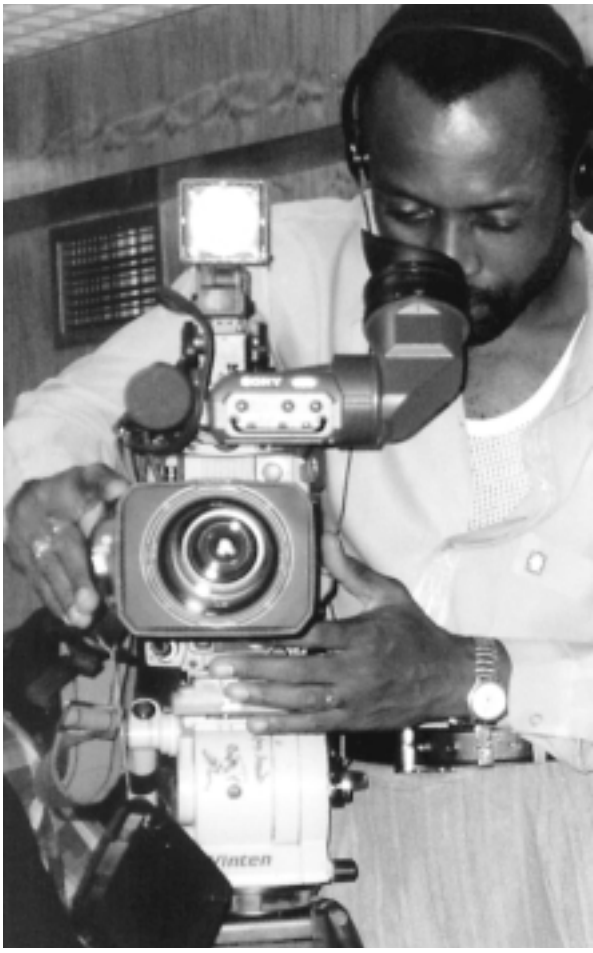
Unfortunately, some governments rush to establish truth commissions without fully sorting through these issues, either because they are eager to pacify domestic constituencies or because they face pressure from the international community to "do something" to address past abuses. The challenge for OSI will be to provide financial support and technical assistance for governments and NGOs that are genuinely wrestling with the best way to address past abuses, without uncritically jumping on the truth commission bandwagon.

Rosa Ehrenreich is an OSI consultant on international legal issues and an associate professor of law at the University of Virginia School of Law.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For information about international justice issues in Africa and beyond, visit No Peace Without Justice at www.npwj.org. By the end of September 2001, information about transitional justice issues can be found at: the International Center for Transitional Justice at www.ictj.org.

Is Angola Really Easing Up on the Media?



International scrutiny of the Angolan government's repression of the media has decreased over the last year. According to Yves Sorokobi, Africa program coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the government has done much to mute criticism through reforms, promises, and effective public relations. ■

YVES SOROKOBI

In Angola, the armed conflict between the government and the UNITA rebel organization drags on, yet President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and his administration are vigorously fighting, and may be winning, the battle to improve Angola's tarnished public image.

"Not only are we concerned (about foreign criticism), but we're strongly engaged in reducing the reasons for that criticism," Communications Vice Minister Manuel Augusto told the AP in December.

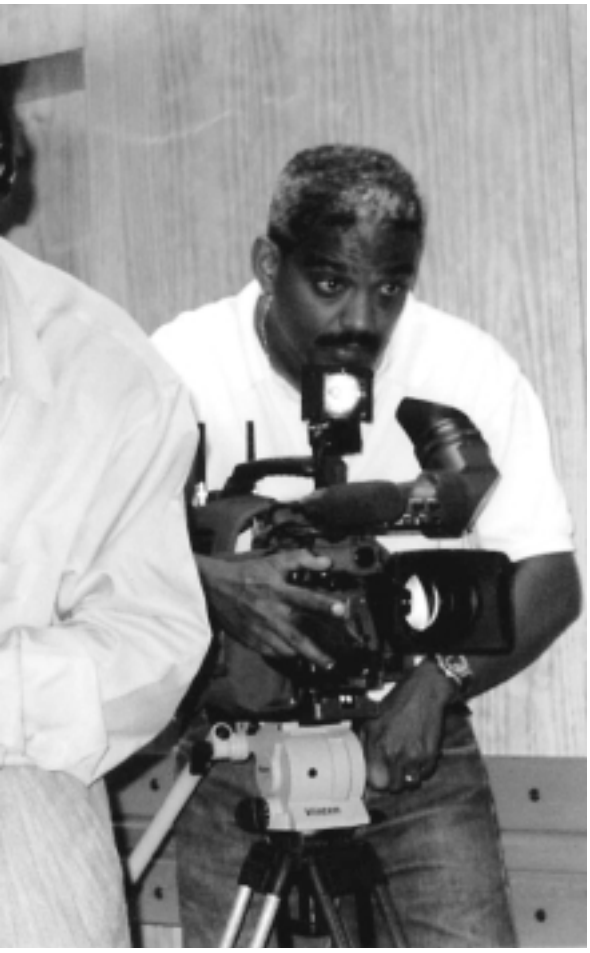
Augusto was responding to critical, high profile publicity generated by press freedom organizations, including the New York–based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The media watchdogs had spent several months aggressively documenting and publicizing the repression of independent journalists by state officials.

In the past, there has been much to criticize regarding the treatment of Angolan media by the government. Officials have filed numerous lawsuits to restrict the press and have detained reporters on charges ranging from criminal defamation to violation of state security.

Illegal moves against the media have followed legal ones. Armed men in army fatigues have raided newsrooms. Outspoken journalists have been kidnapped or forcibly evicted from their homes. Such incidents usually occurred after the publication of news reports that exposed corruption and mismanagement of Angola's enormous mineral resources. As a rule, Angolan authorities have explained this unsavory handling of journalists by citing the need to preserve state security in the face of the country's ongoing civil war.

In the spring of 2000, Angolan authorities brazenly invited more public criticism of their media policies by introducing a draft press law that generated much vitriol and condemnation. Among its many draconian sanctions is the minimum sentence of eight years in jail for criminal libel,

> "President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and his administration may be winning the battle to improve Angola's tarnished public image. Yet it remains to be seen how credible the government's reforms and newfound tolerance for the press really are."



Angolan journalists at work

which can arise from pursuing stories that link government officials to corruption. Journalists can still face jail even if their reports are accurate and verifiable. Clauses relating to state security and military or state secrets will also dramatically hamper the ability of journalists to cover the civil war.

Such intimidation and legislation led CPJ to place President dos Santos on its 2000 annual list of the "ten worst enemies of the press."

Since then, however, the government has introduced reforms and used public relations to temper criticism of Angola's media policies by press freedom advocates, Western governments, and international financial institutions. Yet it remains to be seen how credible the government's reforms and newfound tolerance for the press really are.

The first signs of change occurred in June 2000, when the foreign ministry resurrected its monthly newsletter, *O Diplomata*, with the goal of briefing foreign critics and Angolan expatriates on the country's progress toward peace and democracy.

In September, government cabinet members met with journalists and a CPJ delegation to discuss the government's draft press law. The visit received positive coverage in the *New York Times*, the *Economist*, and other influential publications, which helped put further pressure on the government.

Dos Santos responded one month later and presented the world with a new, more tolerant image by declaring a broad amnesty for a variety of crimes. The amnesty made it explicit that the state was no longer interested in pursuing "crimes against honesty," thus referring to criminal libel and other offenses allegedly committed by journalists against "the honor and reputation" of government officials.

At the same time the president also instructed his minister of communications to release "an illustrated album" that would "strengthen the government's credibility both internally and externally," according to an official statement released on November 11, Angola's Independence Day.

In January 2001, eager to demonstrate their commitment to a free press, authorities allowed the Swiss-based Fondation Hirondelle and UNESCO to start a radio production unit for independent reporters in the capital Luanda. The studio will also serve as a training center for journalists.

This year, President dos Santos did not make the CPJ's "ten worst enemies of the press" list published on May 3. Dos Santos's old ally, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, made the distinguished list, while Charles Taylor of Liberia was also anointed into the club of press tyrants.

The next day, Communications Vice Minister Augusto and diplomats from Angola's mission to the UN visited CPJ's New York office. CPJ reiterated its concern about the draft press law. Augusto said that the law was being rewritten and that a commission of parliamentarians, lawyers, and journalists would work together on the final text. The revised press law, Augusto said, will "eliminate criminal penalties for journalism, rather than increase them."

Yet despite the recent assurances and public relations efforts, the government has continued to restrict and intimidate the country's independent media.

In May 2001, parliament was still considering the press law. While Communications Minister Hendrik Vall Neto publicly described it as a "decisive step in the process of consolidating" Angolan democracy, others have noted that the proposed legislation still increases prison terms and fines for most press offenses and broadens legal protection for state officials.

As of July, the Fondation Hirondelle and UNESCO radio project remained in an embryonic state. No studio has been set up, UNESCO has closed down its offices in Angola, and the project's director will return in August to continue talks with the government and journalists. According to sources in Luanda, few journalists know about the project and the government has been lagging in issuing a broadcast license.

And while no journalists have been formally prosecuted this year, July was marked by several incidents of police detaining independent news reporters and human rights activists and interfering with media coverage of the government's forced relocation of residents from buildings marked for commercial development in Luanda.

Angolan authorities would be mistaken to see the decline in domestic and international disapproval as a sign that they have mollified critics. Vigorous pressure from press freedom advocates must therefore resume, the sooner the better, to make sure that the government's public relations claims reflect reality.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more on press freedom in Angola, visit the website of the Committee to Protect Journalists at www.cpj.org. Other press freedom monitoring websites include www.article19.org and www.hrw.org. For a collection of essays on Angola's civil war, read *Angola: Promises and Lies* by Karl Maier (Serif, 1996).

Housing South Africa's

"If you live in a shack, you don't have confidence or self-esteem. You own a house, other people will respect you. You put a person in a new house, and you can see them growing before your eyes."

—DEVELOPER FRANCES ALBERTS

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has witnessed the construction of over a million low-cost houses—more than any other country over a similar period of time. Nurcha, supported by the South African government and the Open Society Institute, has been a prime contributor to this historic campaign, using loan guarantees to release funds for housing. In the following article, Nonhlanhla Mjoli-Mncube, Nurcha executive director, describes efforts to house South Africa's homeless. ■

(PHOTOS) Developer Frances Alberts, construction in the Northern Province, a new home in Soweto, and, in the background, the Waterloo Housing Project in Durban.

Homeless

NONHLANHLA MJOLI-MNCUBE

The old and new South Africa often come into sharp relief at the housing sites supported by Nurcha.

In the town of Heilbron, for example, a few hours south of Johannesburg, Jacob Masilo has both a house and a shack on his plot of land. The shack is where he lived as a tenant under apartheid. The new house is where he now lives with his family as a homeowner. The postapartheid government gave him the land and the house. The shack, in which Masilo operates a small shop, remains standing because he finds it useful.

In Khayelitsha township, Cape Town, Rose Siyanga is a member of the savings program of the Homeless People's Federation. By saving, she obtained a loan, which she added to her housing subsidy from the government. Her husband, a builder, constructed their house around the shack they lived in. When the new house was far enough along, they tore down the shack, wiping away their personal remnant of apartheid.

"I am so happy and so proud of myself," Rose says. "I tell others you can do it if you save and work hard."

Nurcha helped make the construction of both houses possible.

Originally called the National Urban Reconstruction and Housing Agency, Nurcha began in 1995 as a partnership between the Open Society Institute and South Africa's first democratically elected government. Low-cost housing was a crucial need given the millions of people living in informal settlements, backyard shacks, or overcrowded city dwellings, with no title or tenure and little or no public services.

The government set up a system of subsidies for low-cost housing. A full subsidy (currently R16,000) goes to people earning below R1,500 or $188 a month (using a conversion rate of eight rand for one U.S. dollar). People earning up to R3,500 a month are eligible for partial subsidies.

To start work on a housing project, developers—particularly emerging developers without years of experience or sizable collateral—need to obtain short-term bridging finance loans. Most banks have been reluctant to approve such loans since they consider low-cost housing a high-risk, low-return business.

To lower the perceived risk and encourage banks to participate, OSI made $50 million available to Nurcha for use in guaranteeing loans to developers. As of February 2001, Nurcha had arranged 342 bridging finance loans by providing guarantees of R157.4 million, and contributed to the construction of 70,000 houses.

The 70,000 houses, however, are just a fraction of what is needed. The housing backlog probably remains around three million although nobody knows for sure how many people are crowded into shacks and hostels across the country.

Sometimes working on the housing problem can be discouraging because there appear to be just as many squatter areas as when Nurcha started. In fact, squatter communities have actually grown because more people are now free to move closer to the cities.

Nurcha may not be able to eliminate the backlog. But the more people it can house, the more it enables families to have a better start in life. For those families, life is different. Those that Nurcha has not yet reached see role models all around them for what needs to be done.

The role models include an entirely new generation of developers and contractors. Almost every woman contractor and every black contractor in South Africa who has made it, has made it through Nurcha.

Today developer Frances Alberts builds houses in places like Soweto, where she used to live. She believes a house can transform a person.

"If you live in a shack, you don't have confidence or self-esteem," she says. "You own a house, other people will respect you. You put a person in a new house, and you can see them growing before your eyes."

In the past year, putting people into new houses has become more difficult. The waiting list for subsidies is long. And it is now nearly impossible to deliver a decent house for the R16,000 subsidy. Increases in interest rates, inflation, and building costs have eaten into the value of the subsidy.

To top up the subsidy, Nurcha is helping homeowners through a program of savings and loans. By saving, people show that they can afford to repay a loan, and the savings can be used as security for the loan. If a person saves R1,000 (at a rate of R50 a month), she or he can get a R3,000 loan to add to their subsidy. Nurcha guarantees 50 percent of the loan.

Nurcha is making savings mobilization a priority because it wants to return power to the people. People shouldn't just wait for a subsidy and do nothing. If the government subsidy isn't available, they can still buy new windows and put them into their shacks. If the subsidy does become available, it finds people already doing something, rather than sitting there twiddling their thumbs. The savings program is a consumer movement. The future is in everyone's hands.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Nurcha, visit www.wn.apc.org/nurcha/. OSI's special report on Nurcha, *Building the New South Africa: One House, One Dream at a Time*, is available in print from the Communications Office—and online at www.soros.org.

The Develop

> “Africa has enormous need for microventure capital companies and consultants capable of providing investment and management skills that can transform the creativity and resourcefulness that so typifies the African popular economy into viable enterprises.”

Future of ment in Africa

MICHEL ROCARD

This commentary is adapted from a much longer essay, "The Future of Africa," in which European Parliament member and former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard discusses approaches to maintaining peace in Africa, promoting human rights and democracy, constructing stable governments, and identifying solutions to future development. In the following excerpt, translated from French to English by Robert Bononno, Rocard focuses on development policies, which emphasize financial stability regardless of the cost to social policies, promote privatization of collective activities, and posit exports as the principal engine of growth.

The "informal economy" includes trafficking in diamonds.

Consistent growth, the leading objective of development aid, requires political and social stability. At any given moment, regardless of budget shortfalls, excessive subsidies for consumer goods or government services, or the overhiring of government personnel, we must carefully assess the ability of the social fabric to absorb such readjustment efforts and spread the process over a sufficiently long period of time to minimize the impact on society. Provoking civil unrest is hardly a means for nurturing democracy.

It is true that African governments have rarely been capable of managing—fairly and without corruption—the vast network of public services that their citizens need. Extensive privatization is required. But this should not mask the fact that the market cannot become a substitute for all aspects of government authority. We cannot expect the market to assume a long-term perspective, or provide equal treatment to all users, or incorporate into its investment and rate policies the social and environmental concerns that have become indispensable to us.

Finally, the idea that export sales are the key to development is fundamentally flawed. No development can occur without foreign trade, but to believe that export sales can trigger or are fundamental to development is a serious misconception.

Regardless of the engine used to drive it, development is defined—and this has been observed in practice—as the ability of a given population in a given country to produce more within a given period of time than during a previous period, and distribute somewhat more revenue under conditions that are sufficiently equitable to ensure that the majority of the population consumes that production. Foreign trade is a necessary additive and facilitates this mechanism, but it is not a substitute.

However, the underlying principle guiding the activities of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the major institutions of bilateral cooperation, including the European Development Fund, is that development should be promoted through foreign trade and access to foreign markets, primarily those in developed countries.

Agriculture is a particularly flagrant example of this approach. Immense swaths of land in nearly all countries have been turned over to the production of cash crops. This has influenced the development of infrastructures, training, the development of farmland, even agronomic research. Much greater focus has been placed on the cultivation of coffee, cocoa, peanuts, and cotton, than there has been on food crops, especially in terms of research. There has been little work on developing food crop strains that are resistant to bad weather, disease, or insects. Efforts to prevent desertification and soil erosion were begun much too late and do not receive adequate funding compared to the resources spent on cash crops. Sometimes entire regions have been devoted to export crops so that there is insufficient space for food crops and livestock, small or large. Food self-sufficiency has been sharply declining for decades in nearly all African countries.

This intentionally and tragically skewed vision has completely overlooked the internal components of development. Development must first be internal. It is more profitable for a national economy to strive for food self-sufficiency. By doing so it will be able to reduce its dependence on imports and restrict exports to excess domestic production.

While 10 to 15 percent of the African population benefits from the economic growth created by agrarian or industrial development based on foreign trade, at least 80 percent remains in a state of stagnating poverty, learning to adapt and survive through various channels usually referred to as the "informal economy."

This degrading expression inconveniently lumps together everything that does not fall within the framework of laws and regulations. The informal economy includes a criminal sector comprised of trafficking in drugs, arms, precious stones, and human beings, and a sector of small entrepreneurs and microcompanies that, although not fiscally productive, are healthy. This latter sector needs assistance for its future growth, and it is essential that we distinguish it from the criminal sector, which must be repressed.

Many NGOs and analysts refer to microbusinesses and entrepreneurs as the "popular economy." The term has the benefit of allowing us to better understand this part of the economy and throws a positive light on the phenomenon in question.

It is here in the popular economy that microcredits can have an extraordinary effect.

The poor are a better investment than the rich because they have greater

The "popular economy" includes small entrepreneurs.

respect for money, which is so difficult for them to come by. And if the loan guarantee is not an attachable good but the personal commitment of five or six neighbors or friends of the borrower, who depend on her repayment of the loan so that they can borrow in turn, then the social pressure in favor of repayment is considerable. In well-managed microcredit institutions, the repayment rate can reach 97 or 98 percent.

There are already several hundred, perhaps several thousand, microcredit institutions at work throughout Africa. They need refinancing, funding to train field workers, a suitable legal framework, and a strict separation between the microcredit institution that functions through mutual confidence, without the need for attachable goods or any written document other than recognition of the debt, and the conventional bank based on loan guarantees. If a conventional bank assumes control of a microcredit institution, there is a risk that credit ceilings will increase, thus destroying the perception of credit as a right everyone should have access to.

Microcredit is designed to provide solvency where it's needed. It must help trigger, or at least support, the emergence of a network of suppliers, that is, the creation of small and very-small enterprises that involve the local population.

Africa has enormous need for microventure capital companies and consultants capable of providing investment and management skills that can transform the creativity and resourcefulness that so typifies the African popular economy into viable enterprises.

Women are crucial to the growth of the popular economy in Africa. In Bangladesh women have received 95 percent of the available microcredits. This is what must also occur within the popular economy in Africa. In West Africa, for example, there is a surprisingly large number of women entrepreneurs. These networks are powerful and well organized. In Senegal alone the network includes more than 6000 women who run their own businesses.

The use of microcredits, however, does not mean we should abandon large infrastructures and projects. Rather, and this is essential, the lion's share of aid funding should go toward the development of microeconomies, and less emphasis should be placed on macroeconomic efforts.

The most immediate need, however, involves a reconsideration of existing structural adjustment policies from a more global and, to some extent, more social, point of view. Debt reduction or cancellation should be used more often, to help extend the amount of time allocated for a return to economic stability. We must also put an end to policies that promote ad hoc, discontinuous projects, which, upon completion, have little sustained impact on the underlying economy and rarely produce any viable, productive enterprises.

There must be a healthy reciprocity between government support, which is highly effective for infrastructures and large-scale operations, and the work of the NGOs, which are much better equipped to balance social and environmental needs and transfer skills to the population that allow them to participate in development. It is time that our large public assistance agencies realize that the elimination of poverty requires that every community—and this must begin at the village level—have the right to control local resources, beginning with water, land, and forest resources.

Our entire approach to development aid must be reconsidered, beginning with our priorities. Peace and security are absolute preconditions for growth. Economic development is inconceivable unless it is closely associated with processes for consolidating human rights, a gradual strengthening of democracy, and the construction of appropriate forms of government authority at the appropriate national level.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For the entire essay, go to www.soros.org/open_society_news/rocard.html

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