

ADJUSTMENT IN AFRICA

A REPORT OF
THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC
POLICY NETWORK

July 1996

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THE STORY OF WOMEN

*The story of women and economic justice
is a story of life and death*

*A story about endless agonies
A story about managing the unmanageable
A story of endless hours of work and toil*

A story of sleepless nights

A story about destitution, squalor and neglect

*A story of hearing about policies
that determine our lives but never being
there to participate*

A story of the voiceless and the powerless

*A story of trials and temptations
A story of lost personalities and dignity
A story of survival behind battle fronts
as women and children flee bomb raids*

A story of structural, emotional and physical violence

*A story of struggle and humiliation
A story of dreams and visions unfulfilled
A story of hope*

A story of combat and resistance

*A story of withdrawal from structures of exploitation
A story of innovation and creativity
A story of breaking new frontiers for survival*

*A story of a heroic people marching to
the future with new alternatives for
the survival of the human race.*

By Agnes Chepkwony Abuom

I. INTRODUCTION

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Across the African continent, women are the backbone of national economies. They are responsible for nearly all household food production and processing and play a predominant role in the planting, cultivating and harvesting of cash crops. Women also carry out most of the household maintenance work, such as gathering firewood, hauling water, cooking and cleaning. They have primary responsibility for child and health care and for trading activities. Unfortunately, these contributions are largely unrecognized and women's needs rarely met.

Economic policy in Africa, as in most areas of the world, is determined without the input of the majority of the people it affects. It therefore fails to address the needs and priorities of affected populations. Women, in particular, have been excluded from the process of economic decisionmaking.

One of the major challenges facing African women today is the impact on every aspect of their lives of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) promoted and financed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. SAPs' legacy of currency devaluation, high interest rates, restricted money supply, government spending cuts, lower tariffs and import quotas, privatization and export promotion has increased women's responsibilities while decreasing their access to and control over resources. To date, women's near total exclusion from national and international economic decisionmaking has precluded their ability to stop or reform these destructive policies.

This situation is of great concern to women's groups throughout Africa. Many are therefore mobilizing to challenge women's exclusion from the decisionmaking process and to enable women to better comprehend and shape the economic policies that affect their lives. Some groups are using participatory-learning and popular-education techniques to increase women's understanding of the effects of global economic crises on their lives, analyze their own participation in the local and global economies, organize for current economic survival, and stimulate consideration of alternative economic programs that better address women's particular needs and priorities. Other groups are linking activists and researchers to facilitate joint study of the effects of SAPs on women, using the process of gathering and analyzing information to mobilize women for action. Still others have formed local working groups to lobby government officials and involve broad sectors of civil society in the process. Each of these initiatives builds understanding among women and provides a much needed forum for strategizing and launching actions to integrate women into the economic-policy-making process.

This report is a compilation of the work and action strategies of the African Women's Economic Policy Network (AWEAPON), a growing network of women's organizations and programs throughout the continent that are joining with one another and with international partners to halt structural adjustment programs in Africa and to develop alternative economic policies that reflect women's needs and priorities. The following section provides a summary of the challenges facing women under SAPs. Section III describes the genesis and early activities of AWEAPON. The report's final section discusses the formal structure and plan of action of the Network.

II. THE REAL STORY OF SAPS IN AFRICA:

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DEFINING THE CHALLENGE FACING WOMEN

[This section is adapted from a Development GAP report written by Lisa A. McGowan with the input of AWEAPON members. The report, entitled "The Ignored Cost of Adjustment: Women Under SAPs in Africa," was prepared for discussion at both the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women and the World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings in 1995.]

To the surprise of no one living in Africa, data reveals that poverty is on the rise across the continent and that women in particular are worse off today than they were a decade ago when structural adjustment programs pushed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund became widespread. SAPs have failed throughout Africa to increase investment and savings rates, improve export performance, diminish debt, create jobs, bring about sustained growth, or improve the productive capacity of the poor, the majority of whom are women. Nevertheless, the World Bank and the IMF continue to insist that SAPs, with their emphasis on creating "macroeconomic stability", are the best tool for bringing Africa out of economic crisis and laying the groundwork for economic development.

Women in Africa have a different point of view. Around the continent they are calling for an end to structural adjustment programs, a rethinking of the basic assumptions underlying neo-liberal economic theory, and a retooling of economic policy to address the needs and priorities of women. They are also demanding a role in economic decisionmaking at the national and international levels that reflects their economic and social importance. Their position is informed by their experiences living under SAPs, their own analysis of their situation, and their ideas for and commitment to change.

The Impact of SAPs

SAPs have required 36 countries in sub-Saharan Africa -- where more than half of the population lives in absolute poverty -- to decrease domestic consumption and shift scarce resources into production of cash crops for export. To cut government spending, state-owned companies and many state services have been privatized, civil services have been drastically downsized, and health and education expenditures have been cut and restructured. Resources, including credit and services, have been shifted into the export sector, while taxes and the regulation of export production and marketing have been diminished. Currency devaluations have been undertaken in part to make exports less expensive for buyers in the international market. Efficiency and competitiveness were to be increased by eliminating protective tariffs and marketing boards and by opening up economies to the international market.

This package of measures was imposed across the continent by the World Bank, the IMF and bilateral donors to enable countries to repay their debts, to put themselves on sound financial footing, and ostensibly to pave the way to renewed growth and poverty alleviation. Between 1990 and 1993, the region did, in fact, pay US\$13.4 billion annually to its external creditors -- more than its combined spending on health and education ⁽¹⁾ -- yet the African debt burden continues to rise. In 1994 alone, it increased 3.2 percent to US\$312 billion. ⁽²⁾

In the meantime, these austerity and other adjustment measures have had the combined effect of diminishing women's access to a wide array of productive and social resources. The further impoverishment of African women has been paralleled by a sharp increase in their multiple responsibilities for production and survival of the family and community. In the following subsections, we trace how and why SAPs have impacted women so negatively by analyzing the local effects of a number of adjustment policies.

Devaluation

Currency devaluation makes imported items, such as food, fuel, medicines and spare parts, more expensive and makes locally produced goods less expensive on the international market. This presumably leads to an increase in exports and a decline in the consumption of imports, which helps to reduce a country's balance-of-payments deficit.

However, from the point of view of women, who are responsible for purchasing essential household items, devaluation and the inflation that accompanies it can instantly wipe out their ability to ensure family survival. In Zambia, devaluation combined with other SAP measures to increase the cost of bread from 12 kwacha a loaf in 1990 to 350 kwacha in 1993. In describing what such a rapid and massive decrease in purchasing power seemed like to her, a woman from an eastern province in Uganda said, "The government has stolen our money."

In January 1994, 14 countries in the CFA zone in Africa devalued their currency overnight by 50 percent. However, other adjustment policies suppressed wages in these countries, hitting local purchasing power hard and thereby undermining any potential pick-up in production for the local market. A year after the CFA devaluation, newspapers in Senegal reported inflation rates for that country of more than 60 percent, with peak levels at 120 percent for certain daily consumer goods in the food and health sectors. Women in the Kaolack region report a drastic change in eating habits, with their families being forced to choose between reducing the proportion of the household budget allocated for food and foregoing expenditures related to health care, schooling, rent or household repair. They report that prices are so high that women often cannot purchase basic goods even if they are available in the market.⁽³⁾

The inflationary effects of devaluation impact women's production as well as consumption. Agricultural production for export, for example, tends to be heavily reliant on imported inputs, the price of which rises under devaluation, and female farmers and other small producers often cannot afford the higher prices. This is one reason why female farmers are often unable to participate in export production, even when the prices for exports increase. Where devaluation has helped to increase agricultural exports, it has usually been in sectors controlled by men. This was the case in Mali and Burkina Faso, where the CFA devaluation brought about a large increase in the sale of livestock, a male-dominated sector, to other countries in the region.⁽⁴⁾

Inflation caused by devaluation has also had negative effects on small-scale marketers, a sector that is dominated in many countries by women. In Senegal, women report that second-hand clothing sellers could once sell a 50-kg. bale of clothes costing 15,000 CFA in a day. Today, a bale costs 75,000 CFA and takes two weeks to sell.⁽⁵⁾ In Ghana, women traders, referring to the impact on their customers of higher prices brought about by devaluation, say simply, "They don't buy."⁽⁶⁾

Agricultural Policy Reform

World Bank agricultural adjustment programs are designed to shift resources to export-crop production, which is typically controlled by men, and to remove what the Bank has determined are the major constraints to such production. Common policy elements in these programs

include: eliminating price controls on agricultural commodities; lowering trade barriers to agricultural products by eliminating tariffs; dismantling marketing boards; devaluing the local currency, which, as noted above, decreases the cost of a country's goods overseas; and changing land laws for the principal purpose of attracting foreign investment.

None of these policies address what women around Africa have noted as the primary constraints to production and to achieving household food security: the lack of credit; insufficient farm labor; insecure access to land; and unaffordable farm inputs. African women have also advocated support for local or household-level food storage, research on improved production and seed stock for women's crops, and tariff protection for local food crops.

This is no small oversight on the part of the Bank, given that women produce upwards of 70 percent of Africa's food, account for more than 90 percent of all time spent processing and preparing food, and provide the bulk of agricultural labor.

Because much of women's food production is consumed in the home or traded in local markets, and because women rarely have the resources to make a production switch, producer-price increases brought about by devaluation or reduced price controls are not a sufficient incentive for them to produce more. Indeed, the fact that few small-farm households -- especially the very poor and landless farm households, in which women are over represented -- are food self-sufficient across seasons and thus depend on purchased food as an important part of consumption means that increased food prices can actually threaten the food security of women farmers and their families. In some countries, this is the case for up to 50 percent of smallholder households.⁽⁷⁾

SAPPING NIGERIA

Since its birth in 1986, the Structural Adjustment Programme has brought untold hardship to the lives of Nigerians, especially the rural woman. She has become more and more hopeless and gradually frustrated because her family is poor, diseased and hunger stricken, without any ray of hope shining on her. Her children spend more time every academic year at home rather than at school due to the incessant non-payment of teachers' basic salaries. Seventy percent of the national population are illiterate adults, most of them peasant rural dwellers.

The Federal Government finds it difficult to pay workers' salaries, repair bad roads or ensure the maintenance of good health for all. Since the idea of a balanced diet is a far-fetched idea for the rural woman and children, you find that cases of

malnutrition are on an alarming increase. Diseases like guinea worm have infected so many areas and sent many little children and adults to their graves too early, just because rural women and their children do not have access to fresh, clean tap water.

We at the Development Education Centre, a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Enugu, Nigeria, were tired of looking at the status of our rural women without doing anything. We decided to swing into action to salvage what remained of the lives of these strong rural women who actually cater to the food needs of the so-called elites in the big cities and towns. We gave birth to a series of life-transforming programs in health, education, food and shelter. Our agricultural specialists fashioned very simple machines that are capable of producing our main staple foods within minutes. The rural women organize themselves into effective units either producing food items or engaging in animal husbandry, like piggery, goatery, and rabbitary farms. Even with a "sapped" economy, our rural women are raising the levels of rural survival, which no government can give them.

by Mrs. Kechi Florence Okpara, D.E.C. Nigeria

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By drawing such critical resources as women's labor away from food production and household provisioning and into export-crop production, World Bank policies further weaken women's food-production systems, which are already fragile from environmental degradation, war and poverty. Per capita food production has decreased an average of close to two percent a year in the 1980s, while food imports have increased.

Women in Uganda report that government incentives to produce beans for export have left them with no food crops for their families. In Kenya, women speak of planting tobacco -- an export crop -- right up to their door, yet not having enough money to buy food. Studies show that the nutritional status of women and children is worse among cash-crop farmers, particularly where the crops are tobacco, coffee and cotton. A woman farmer in Zaire, referring to a scheme to switch land used for food into export-crop production, also spoke to the wider reality of rural

women across the continent when she observed, "If you have to buy food, you will never get enough."

The reduction of barriers to production and trade has failed in many cases to benefit women in their agricultural roles and often works against them. In Ghana, for example, cocoa marketing boards were dismantled as a means to make the Ghanaian cocoa farmer more competitive in the international market and to enable small cocoa farmers in southern Ghana, many of whom are women, to receive a higher price for their crop. Female farmers increased the production of cocoa, as did other producers. A glut in the market, due in part to the fact that the World Bank had led many cocoa-producing countries down the same road, soon followed. As was the case in Tanzania and other countries in Africa, women still had to buy clothes and food, seeds and fertilizer, as well as pay school fees and medical expenses, and the cost of all these items had increased, in part due to a devaluation. Thus, the gains women made through initially high cocoa prices were quickly wiped out, leaving them worse off than before.

SAPPING GHANA

The adverse consequences of the 1983 introduction of Structural Adjustment Policies to the Ghanaian economy have been felt particularly hard by the nation's poor, women and children. In an early effort to alleviate the detrimental impact of SAPs on these members of the population, the government initiated a Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) in 1985. However, apart from representing an acknowledgment of the unequal burden shared by the poor, women and children, PAMSCAD was largely ineffectual.

Across several important categories, SAPs in Ghana have continued to decrease the living standards of women. In a decisionmaking process that is dominated by IMF/World Bank officials and a small minority of male political leaders and senior bureaucrats, policies have evolved that are detrimental to women in the areas of agricultural production, employment, health and education. Higher prices for the export crop of cocoa mean increased revenues for the predominantly male cash-crop producers. Meanwhile, the removal of subsidies from crucial inputs has placed the means of production out of the reach of women farmers, as their food crops generate insufficient revenue.

Employment levels among women, like the rest of the population, have been reduced by the privatization of state enterprises and the reorganization of the bureaucracy. Yet these trends are additionally detrimental to women, who in their role as managers of the household are forced to make difficult adjustments. Increased unemployment has also led to a breakdown in the family unit while encouraging women to choose prostitution as a means of income generation, hastening the spread of AIDS.

The introduction of user fees has reduced access for both men and women to basic health-care facilities. The resultant fall in hospital attendance has led to an increase in unpaid labor provided by women, as they must care for the ill within the household. In addition, the rising costs of child birth has encouraged women to give birth at home, increasing the incidence of maternal mortality. UNICEF's 1993 figures place maternal mortality rates in Ghana as high as 1,000 deaths to 100,000 births, one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa.

Regarding education, the introduction of user fees and the failure to expand services have led to a decline in attendance levels and decreased the quality of education. Here, too, females appear to be disproportionately affected by these changes. Drop-out rates are higher for girls, and the gap between the educational levels of boys and girls, especially in the higher grades, continues to widen.

In sum, the application of SAPs in Ghana has contributed to a state of extreme hardship for the poor and, within this sector, has furthered gender inequities as women shoulder a disproportionate amount of this burden.

by Edzodzina Tsikata, Third World Network - Africa

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Trade and Market Liberalization

Under SAP trade- and market-liberalization programs, import and export restrictions are lifted, tariffs are decreased, and the control of crops is removed from marketing boards. Intended to open markets to international competition and investment, stimulate exports, and increase efficiency, these policies also reduce the capacity of the state to protect important local industries, encourage domestic food production, or direct scarce foreign currency to the purchase of essential imports. Women are impacted in a variety of ways, both directly as workers, consumers and producers and indirectly through the filter of intra-household relations.

Lifting import controls often leads to the dumping of foreign goods, especially agricultural and light industrial products, which can destroy domestic production and jobs. Since Tanzania opened its doors to imports in 1984, over 90 percent of the country's textile mills, which employ mostly women, have closed. In Zimbabwe, a similar situation is emerging. More than 8,000 textile workers are facing unemployment because firms in that country can no longer compete with Taiwanese imports. ⁽⁸⁾

Trade liberalization has helped turn Uganda into a "second-hand society". Large increases in the import of cheap second-hand clothes threaten the livelihoods of small-scale seamstresses, as well as larger textile concerns. Similar situations are reported around Africa.

In some cases, the demand for woman's traditional crops did rise with liberalization. In Zambia, for example, the importance of beans, a woman's crop that traditionally was consumed in the home and sold on a small scale to urban traders, grew. As the beans became a major source of cash, men moved in many places to control the income from their sale. While liberalization helped to stimulate production, the World Bank did not take into account the prospective household-level impact of the policy and implement parallel strategies for ensuring that women would retain control of their income. The program thus served to decrease women's ability to provide for their children and forced them to seek agricultural day work -- in which wages are very low and women earn less than a third of what men do -- to maintain the level of income they need to purchase essential goods for the family. ⁽⁹⁾

Wage Restraint and Labor-Market Deregulation

Wage restraint -- that is, keeping both private- and public-sector wage increases below inflation - - is mandated as a condition for receiving adjustment loans. This is accomplished through a variety of means, from freezing minimum wages while allowing prices to rise, to actually cutting wages and reducing benefits that accrue to wage employment. According to the International Labour Organization, real wages in most African countries have fallen between 50 and 60 percent since the early 1980s. ⁽¹⁰⁾

For the poor, the silver lining of a low minimum wage in the formal sector is supposed to be higher employment. This has not materialized, however. The massive wage drop in Africa during the 1980s correlates with a decrease in formal-sector employment. Women's formal-sector

employment decreased from ten percent in 1980 to less than eight percent in 1990, even though their wages are lower than those of men.

Many women with formal-sector jobs have suffered such a loss in real income that they are forced to engage in informal-sector activity to supplement their earnings. A social worker in Uganda with a full-time job reports that in order to pay school fees for her four children she must also work evenings baking cakes for sale and designing and sewing wedding dresses. And, while men are also increasingly being forced to work additional jobs, it is more often than not the women who carry the responsibility for the family and do whatever job is necessary to make ends meet.

SAP-mandated low wages have a ripple effect throughout the economy, placing further downward pressure on women's income. For example, falling incomes have destroyed local demand for goods produced by women, such as textiles, and created large numbers of unemployed workers. These displaced women have been forced into the informal sector in large numbers to compensate for their own income loss and that of their respective households. This has greatly increased competition and further decreased women's income in that sector. Women traders in Zimbabwe report that, by 1993, business conditions had deteriorated noticeably, even though a devastating drought had passed. The traders identified their customers' insufficient income as the primary reason for this problem. ⁽¹¹⁾

While wage suppression itself has had multiple negative effects on women, their situation around Africa has been further exacerbated by the deregulation of labor markets, which has increased the exploitation of their labor. It has led, for example, to a significant increase in contracting-out arrangements in which women undertake piecework in their homes. Not only are women paid abysmally low wages for long hours, but, because regulation is non-existent and there is no separation between living and work space, women and their children face increased health hazards.

Privatization and Retrenchment

The privatization of state industries and the retrenchment of government employees have resulted in massive numbers of unemployed workers across Africa. Because of their predominance in low-skill jobs, female workers have experienced higher levels of retrenchment than have men working in private-sector enterprises. Women's concentration in secretarial, teaching and primary-care sectors has also meant that they suffer disproportionately under government retrenchments. ⁽¹²⁾ This is another contributing factor to the decline in women's formal-sector employment noted above.

In some cases, when men are fired from formal-sector jobs as a result of cost-cutting measures, they enter the already saturated informal sector, thereby displacing women who have traditionally depended on this sector for their sole source of income. In Ghana, young men have swelled the ranks of those hawking second-hand clothing and other commodities traditionally sold by women. They have even appeared in the female-dominated local food markets, creating gender tensions when they expect female deference. ⁽¹³⁾

In Zambia, where over 72,000 people have lost their jobs in SAP-induced retrenchments, there are now a reported three million part-time child laborers out of a total national population of nine million. Female participation in the informal sector increased from 46 percent in 1980 to 57 percent in 1986. During that same period, there was a nine-fold increase in the 12-to-14-year age group working in the informal sector. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Cuts in Health-Care Expenditures

An integral part of SAPs during the 1980s was the slashing of expenditures in the social-service sector, including health care. By the end of the 1980s, real per capita government expenditures on health were below their 1980 levels in 64 percent of countries for which data was available. ⁽¹⁵⁾ In Tanzania, for example, per capita expenditure on health care fell from US\$7.00 in 1980 to US\$2.00 in 1990. This trend has continued in countries like Zimbabwe, where per capita expenditure fell from nearly US\$6.00 in 1990 to US\$3.84 in 1994.

Women have been hit hard by these budget reductions. The United Nations reports that, in Zimbabwe, maternal and infant mortality rates are "unacceptably high" in rural areas and are increasing in Harare, the capital. Infant mortality rates reflect the economic, health and social status of the mother and thus serve as a proxy variable for measuring the impact of policies on women. The World Health Organization reports that maternal mortality is increasing across East, Central and West Africa. ⁽¹⁶⁾

In recent interviews on the quality of health care, women in both Zimbabwe and Uganda report that user fees, a standard SAP prescription designed to defray the cost of services, make even basic health care unaffordable. In Zimbabwe the maternal mortality rate rose from 90 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 168 per 100,000 in 1993 following the introduction of user fees.

What's more, women in these countries report that, contrary to the expectations of the World Bank, the quality of health care has actually declined with the introduction of user fees and the commercialization of health care. As one Zimbabwean woman noted, "The nurse is the doctor, the nurse, everything. No wonder she becomes irritable." Another said simply, "The amount of work is too much [for them]." This is the case not only because of higher case loads under conditions of declining pay, decaying infrastructure and dwindling state funding, but also because the nurses' search for extra income "has become nearly universal with the advent of SAPs." ⁽¹⁷⁾

SAPPING ZIMBABWE, 1990-96

Since October 1990, Zimbabwe has had in place a World Bank/IMF-crafted Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). The stated intentions behind the ESAP were to address specific structural impediments in the economy with economic measures which would ultimately result in accelerating growth, expanding

employment, reducing poverty, and improving the living conditions of society's most vulnerable sectors, notably the poor.

Just the opposite has occurred five years into the ESAP. Within the most basic and socially broad categories of human development the introduction of the ESAP has resulted in higher levels of child malnutrition, a lower life expectancy, and higher mortality rates (infant and adult), as well as an increase in maternal deaths.

Needless to say, women and children have borne the brunt of the crippling effects of Zimbabwe's experiment with the ESAP. Due to sharp cuts in social spending, and the introduction of prohibitive user fees for health care and education, a significant portion of the population (mainly females) is now excluded from basic medical services and primary schooling. The health sector has been called a "national disaster" because of the extreme shortages of drugs, supplies, food, etc.

Furthermore, real wages have declined by 40 percent every year, and inflation is running at 23 percent. The nation's debt now stands at Z\$36.5 billion, of which Z\$2 billion is scheduled for debt repayment. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe has experienced a precipitous decline in foreign-exchange earnings and an overall sluggish rate of growth alongside the obligatory reduction in government budgets and social-sector spending.

Popular participation has obviously not been part of the recipe for the design and implementation of Zimbabwe's ESAP. This is evidenced by the popular reaction to the program, which has included the children's bread riots of 1993, strikes, and endless demonstrations opposing the program, as well as the Mugabe government.

However, it should be noted that, amidst all the squalor, deprivation and hardship that so many have had to endure, the struggle continues. Symbolic of this struggle for popular participation is the

Economic Justice Network (EJN, a forum for policy dialogue and debate), the Women Action Group (WAG), and the Ecumenical Support Services (ESS), in addition to the Zimbabwe Council of Churches.

Adapted from: "The Effects of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Zimbabwe,"

by Deprose Tongai Muchena, Zimbabwe Council of Churches

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In Uganda, women told the same story. Not only do they pay consultation fees, they also pay for prescriptions and other services. In addition, they must purchase medicines, dressings, theater operating kits, gloves and other items related to their treatment. Worse still, women report that they are expected to pay bribes to health-care providers. When they visit a doctor, for example, he asks if the patient has "come with her sister," meaning a bribe. Women also report that deregulated markets for pharmaceuticals in Uganda have resulted in an explosion of unqualified "pharmacists" dispensing drugs, as well as increased marketing of expired drugs.

In both Uganda and Zimbabwe, women attributed the decline in the quality of care to the fact that user fees, combined with low government salaries, deregulated health-care markets and economic hardship, have made health care a business rather than a p

Decline in Education Budgets

Women raise similar concerns vis-a-vis expenditure cuts and user fees in education. Total public spending on education in sub-Saharan Africa fell in real terms between 1980 and 1988 from US\$11 billion to US\$7 billion. A review of 26 countries shows a decline in spending per pupil from US\$133 to US\$89. The reduction in educational spending has directly eroded the quality of schooling. In many countries, the whole infrastructure of support services -- school inspection and supervision, in-service teacher education, curriculum development, school health services, and maintenance of school furniture, equipment and physical facilities -- has deteriorated.

Even more serious is the marked drop in gross enrollment rates at the primary-school level, which fell from 77.1 percent in 1980 to an estimated 66.7 percent in 1990. With the introduction of school fees, girls are often withdrawn from school and at rates higher than for boys. The inability to pay school fees is one reason; another is the fact that girls provide valuable services and income to their families, which poor families can no longer live without. In Africa in the 1980s, female school enrollment rates dropped and drop-out rates increased. On average, only 37 percent of school-age girls were enrolled in first or second levels of education in 1990. Rural

women in Uganda lament the fact that their children are not receiving as good an education today as they themselves did 20 years ago.

MORE ON ZIMBABWE

In 1990, when the ESAP was introduced in Zimbabwe, it was supposed to be a SAP with a "human face". Unfortunately the program was introduced without consultation with the people and, although people were told to "tighten their belts," top government officials were opening their belts even wider. This created a negative attitude towards ESAP in the country.

The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Beautiful new buildings are going up all over the city of Harare. But there is no sign of improvement in employment opportunities. In fact, the rate of retrenchments and rising unemployment is very high and unsettling.

Introduction of user fees for health attention is demoralizing to the poor, especially women. They are required to prove their poverty before they can be exempted from payment of fees. The process is long and cumbersome. The maternal mortality rate has generally increased.

There is evidence, especially in girls' secondary schools, of an increase in drop-outs mainly due to non-payment of school fees. Where families have a shortage of funds for school fees, the girls become sacrificial lambs. The illiteracy rate, which dramatically improved after independence, is experiencing a set-back. The more school drop-outs and children who do not go to school, all the more the illiteracy rate will increase.

Since the removal of subsidies on basic commodities, there has been a shift to maize meal consumption, away from roller meal. Since women must walk far to grinding mills to buy maize, consumption of bread has fallen.

Women are looking for avenues to keep their heads

above water in these harsh economic times. They are still recovering from the effects of the 1992 drought. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches is now training them in food preservation and grain storage, and may pursue these as business ventures. Women try to be resourceful, but it is difficult to survive.

By Belisha Tanyongana, Zimbabwe Council of Churches

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The World Bank is aware of these failures. Indeed, so compelling was its own data about the effects of collapsing health and educational systems that the Bank, which presided over a decade of crippling human-resource expenditure cuts, is now calling for a reversal of that trend. The international financial institutions (IFIs) are not well suited to undertake timely analysis or to make mid-term corrections, however, and these changes have been painfully slow in coming. Furthermore, health and education services have deteriorated to such an extent that it will take several years to recoup losses, even with increased investment. In the meantime, the health and education of a generation of women and girls have been sacrificed on the altar of that elusive priority called macroeconomic stability.

Wearing Women Down: The Cumulative Impact of SAPs

By their very scope, SAPs impose a multitude of negative effects on women, which they are simply expected to bear. Indeed, women in Africa have been widely lauded for their ability to "adapt" and find new ways to generate income from the informal sector for their families in the face of the severe economic austerity caused by SAPs. This resourcefulness and ability to "make do" has been overemphasized and romanticized. For many women, it simply means deprivation, uncertainty and a never-ending struggle to survive.

Women note that there has been an increase in violence against them due to higher levels of frustration and stress within the family caused by reduced income and intense financial pressures brought on by the imposition of SAPs. A woman in Senegal said, "Our men have turned more violent ever since we started working and acquiring a little money while they remained unemployed."⁽¹⁸⁾ In addition, women have become more vulnerable to violence and sexual attacks as they join the informal sector and seek odd jobs in the streets.

Female-headed households are also on the rise as economic crisis causes more men to migrate in search of work, abandon their families, or simply withdraw from supporting their children. It is widely estimated that 30 percent of African households are now headed by women. Dependency ratios, which reflect the number of young children and older people per productive adult, are

very high in these households, which, because they are characterized by a lack of both adult labor and productive resources, as well as limited access to social services, also tend to be among Africa's poorest. Having been abandoned by the government and also having lost, through desertion, widowhood or migration the men in their families, these women must shoulder the increasingly heavy burden of caring for children and ensuring their families' survival. Things have gotten so bad, however, that vulnerable members of the household, such as children and the elderly, are being forced out in increasing numbers. In Nairobi, for example, there are tens of thousands of street children, where a decade ago there were virtually none.

The effects of the mental stress of balancing multiple roles, the physical wear and tear of overwork, and the psychological impact of grinding poverty and worry about survival accumulate and damage women's health over the long term. Women's own quality of life is damaged, as is their capacity for productive activity, for ensuring the survival of their families, and for contributing to the viability of their societies. This constitutes a long-term degradation of a human resource that poor populations, and poor countries, can ill afford or sustain.

III. WOMEN TAKING CHARGE:

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THE GENESIS OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC POLICY NETWORK AND THE ROAD THROUGH DAKAR

By the late 1980s, just a few years after the imposition of SAPs in many countries in Africa, women's programs and organizations had begun to challenge these policies while working with their constituencies to better understand the causes of the devastation they saw and felt all around them. The Women's Programme of the All African Council of Churches was a leader in this regard, launching an economic-literacy program among its member councils. This effort spawned economic-literacy programs within church councils in countries as diverse as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana, Cameroon and Uganda, creating an invaluable network of women with experience in using participatory-learning and popular-education techniques.

In Zimbabwe, unions linked women workers, activists and researchers to study the effects of SAPs on women, using the process of gathering and analyzing information to mobilize women for action. The Zimbabwe Women's Resource Center and Network undertook a program to gather and disseminate any information on women and structural adjustment it could find. In Senegal, women from local-level organizations formed working groups to lobby government officials and involve broad sectors critical research and policy analysis. These and many other groups have built understanding among women and provide much-needed forums for strategizing and launching actions to integrate women into the economic-policy-making process.

Groups in North America have also been active in the struggle against adjustment programs, lobbying their own governments, educating their citizens about the role and dangers of SAPs, and linking with groups around the world to present a global citizen response to a global

problem. As part of these efforts, The Development GAP in 1992 co-organized and hosted an international conference on structural adjustment. Over 100 groups from around the world participated, all of which were working to challenge the hegemony of the World Bank and the IMF in the determination of economic policy in their respective countries. The need for participation of local populations in the formulation of economic policy was a key theme of the forum.

Despite the fact that women made up 40 percent of the participants and the discussions were intended to be gender-inclusive, there emerged no clear expression of women's particular perspectives, needs and priorities vis-a-vis economic policy and alternatives to SAPs. This fact led The Development GAP, as part of its work to ensure that women's voices were fully represented in its own work and in international citizens' movements, to actively seek partnerships with women's organizations and programs in Africa that were dealing with economic policy at the grassroots level. Staff traveled to Africa to meet with representatives of over 30 women's programs in five countries. These discussions produced the idea of convening a meeting in Washington to further advance what clearly had become a common agenda: integrating African women's particular needs, priorities and knowledge into economic policymaking.

The Beginning of AWEAPON

In October 1993, 11 representatives of African women's organizations that work on gender issues as they relate to economic policy joined together in Washington, D.C. at a meeting organized and hosted by The Development GAP and funded by Oxfam America and the World Council of Churches. The women, bringing their diverse experiences, met for three days to strategize as to how African women could play a direct and proactive role in:

- **increasing awareness among policymakers of the effects of their decisions on women's lives;**
- **formulating mechanisms for "getting women to the table"; and**
- **shaping economic policies so that they meet the particular needs of women.**

The forum also provided the participants with an opportunity to meet with U.S. NGOs, members of the U.S. Congress and staff of the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID). They shared their real-life experiences, urging policymakers to include women in decisionmaking processes.

After lengthy deliberations, the participants made a number of commitments and recommendations for both individual and joint action. Among the priority actions they agreed upon were:

- **providing support for popular education and economic literacy for poor and non-literate women;**

- **creating effective national and international partnerships among NGOs, researchers and field workers that could facilitate women's access to information about relevant economic issues;**
- **organizing to increase women's access to resources so that they can directly and effectively address these issues within national and international decisionmaking processes;**
- **using media and direct educational strategies to raise awareness about women's concerns and recommendations; and**
- **exerting influence at the African Regional Preparatory Conference in Dakar to ensure that an analysis of economic policy -- how it affects women and how women should be involved in its formulation -- would be prominently featured in the official African regional platform and ultimately at the 1995 U.N. World Conference on Women in Beijing.**

ECONOMIC LITERACY

Economic literacy, or the training of people in the economic policies that affect their lives, is a primary tool for enabling women to shape economic decisionmaking. Economic-literacy programs begin with women's knowledge of their household economy--and build up. For women, some of the important results of undergoing economic-literacy programs are that they are able to: become familiar with and demystify economic jargon; begin to see themselves as integral parts of their country's economy; explore ways in which their lives and concerns are affected by economic policies; understand their wide range of roles and the contributions that women make to national and international economic development; see the economy as a social and personal issue and so reclaim it as their business; and begin to develop and push for their own vision of "economic restructuring". Armed with this knowledge and understanding, women can proceed to influence policy.

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In order to transform the dream into reality, the Director of the Women's Programme of the National Council of Churches of Kenya worked with The Development GAP in June and July 1994 to plan and fundraise for the Dakar activities. This followed collaboration in making logistical arrangements that enabled women from 15 African countries to come together in Dakar in November 1994.

The program for Dakar included:

- **a one-day follow-up meeting of the participants of the October 1993 meeting;**
- **the planning and presentation of a workshop on women and economic policy during that week's NGO Forum at the pre-Beijing regional Preparatory Conference;**
- **lobbying to influence the U.N.'s African Regional Platform for Action so that it would clearly reflect**
- **a second planning and strategy meeting related to the establishment of an African Women in Economic Policy Network.**

Dakar and the Second "African Women in Economic Policy" Meeting

On 10 November 1994, a one-day meeting of representatives from the organizations that participated in the Washington forum iast year and to finalize a strategy for formalizing and expanding the network and influencing the NGO Forum.

A two-day meeting followed in which ways were discussed to continue to work together post-Dakar in order to further the agenda of African women in influencing economic policy. The 26 participants at the second meeting included the core group and others from 15 African countries identified through networks and contacts of the group. They represented a wide range of women from grassroots women's organizations, public-policy institutes, church organizations and popular groups.

The meeting began with community-building exercises to develop rapport among the women, who came from different experiences. The idea, as described by one of the participants, was to "break the ice" so that the very intensive work agenda could be achieved. The participants worked with materials and information on the World Bank and the IMF, the effects of SAPs on women, and international activism. These included information from their respective organizations on the effects of their nations' structural adjustment programs on the women with whom they work and how they mobilize for survival. In the context of strengthening groups working on the issues, the participants discussed means of follow-up in order to promote meaningful change over the long term.

Enlarging the Circle

Holding the meetings in Dakar afforded the participants the opportunity to reach out to some of the more than 3,000 women who were attending the NGO Forum. A workshop on "Women and Economic Policy" was conducted, with the focus on the effect of economic policies on women, as well as on women's own analyses of the economic crisis. It was planned in recognition of the fact that:

- **there is a lack of input into economic policy from women, who are the ones most affected by SAPs;**
- **those participating were among -- or live and work with -- those women particularly hard hit by these policies; and**
- **a need existed to expand the network of women and men who work on these issues and who may not be aware of others on the continent supporting women's efforts and struggling, as well, to affect economic decisionmaking.**

The workshop opened with a role-playing exercise designed both to avoid the monotony of panel presentations and to draw out the strong beliefs and feelings about SAPs that resided in the audience of over 150 women and a handful of men. The role play was successful in doing this, while also:

- **highlighting the main themes and conflicts faced by women and the society at large related to the impact of structural adjustment programs;**
- **generating rich and lively discussions on the issue;**
- **bringing to life the suffering and strength of women and children; and**
- **providing a model of how popular-education techniques can be used effectively to generate interest and discussion among a diverse group of women, such as one might find in any community.**

A ROLE PLAY

Early in the morning, as the villagers ponder what to do, a news item on the national radio station captures their attention.

The government is introducing radical changes in the economy driven by the overall policy framework under the structural adjustment program (SAP). It calls for total cooperation from its citizens and condemns any dissenting views regarding this noble goal.

The villagers are apprehensive about such changes,

which they were not consulted on beforehand. There is some fear that all is not well.

At home a mother can buy less food and other items with the same amount of money due to the devaluation of the local currency and price increases.

Children come back from school with a myriad of problems. They need various text books, contributions towards the building of the science block, sports fees, sports uniforms, school fees, exam fees, etc. As the mother tries to calm down the children and share the little food she has, the husband arrives home drunk, demanding a lot of attention and threatening everybody in the family. Apparently the girl child has failed her exams since she had no time to review for them. She had been helping her mother with domestic work while her brother reviewed for his exams.

The family cannot afford to educate both children, so the girl child is discontinued from school. In any case, she can continue helping the mother with the domestic work.

Out of this frustration the girl child leaves home to look for a job in town. Since she has very little education she finds it very difficult to get any meaningful job and ends up in prostitution.

After several years she comes back home to find her mother still in poverty and offers to help. Her mother is shocked because of the change in the daughter. She is very smartly dressed. She has a packet of cigarettes in her handbag and a lot of money in different currencies. The mother wants to know where the girl is working but the daughter cannot explain. Realizing what her daughter does to earn such money, the mother is in a dilemma whether to accept it or not. She goes through a painful and agonizing moment before she reaches a decision.

Amidst all these multiple problems within the

family, the national government and World Bank officials are wining and dining at five-star hotels as they negotiate the loans and ways of implementing the structural adjustment program.

The role play focuses on:

- the roles played by the national government at the donors' consultative meetings and the government's lack of adequate information on the proposals;
- weak bargaining positions at the table; and
- multiple effects on families of SAPs and related policies, such as currency devaluation, resulting in less money for food, lack of school fees leading to school drop-outs, especially among girls, and moral decadence evidenced in increased alcoholism, prostitution and the breaking up of families.

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Following the discussion, five women presented information on their actions to fight structural adjustment, build grassroots women's understanding of SAPs, develop alternatives and advocacy strategies and link with other groups in Africa and internationally.

The workshop also provided the participants an opportunity to:

- learn more about various initiatives and share information about each other's concerns and work in this area;
- discuss and adopt strategies for ensuring that the matter of women and economic policy would be a key issue addressed by the Africa Platform for Action;
- select and encourage representatives to lobby the official Dakar Preparatory Conference in this regard; and
- establish contacts for longer-term collaborative efforts to promote women's full participation in

Although much was accomplished, many women felt frustrated by too many descriptions of the situation and a failure to highlight strategies. As one participant said, "The challenge that faces many African women mobilizing around this issue is to come up with concrete strategies."

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Participants evaluated the Economic Policy Meeting, as well as the results of the workshop presented at the NGO Forum. The following are some of the comments.

"It was like the experience of having a first child -- the joy at the result even though there were labor pains."

"I feel a great sense of achievement from that workshop."

"Popular education is important; what we have seen in our meeting should continue."

"The meeting succeeded but there was a lot of emphasis on the problem and lack of analysis. We need to zero in on the solutions."

"The role play was great, only regret that we didn't have more time to work all day and get to the alternatives."

"Some of us struggling in isolation with SAPs and economic literacy were beginning to think it was hopeless and useless. Now we see a ray of hope. What seems hopeless may bring hope."

"Mechanisms for creating alternatives are very important. The basis is not only a tool to get information, but also a source of information and analysis."

"Salute the initiative, participatory methodology and the network we are trying to put in place. It is difficult but will put us on the real road to the integration of the people in Africa."

"Commend the spirit of voluntarism of the group, the quality of the facilitation. We have the ability to dent the system and create an opening for women."

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Women's Experience and Analysis of SAPs

Common themes emerged from the intense discussions at both the Economic Policy Meetings and the workshop at the NGO Forum. Quite striking were women's similar experiences under SAPs, regardless of their country of origin. These included:

Social Disintegration

- Family unrest and conflict
- Increasing levels of crime
- Increased prostitution
- Homelessness
- Alcoholism
- Drug addiction and trafficking
- Brain drain
- Increased violence against women
- Increase in households headed by women, who struggle as small-scale farmers, food processors and retail traders

Education Problems

- Decline in the levels of school attendance, particularly among girls
- Deterioration of the educational infrastructure
- Increased drop-out levels, especially for girls
- Overcrowding in schools as a result of budget cuts, forcing pupils to attend schools in shifts and for fewer hours

Health Problems

- Increase in women's workload
- Increased psychological stress
- Increased maternal and infant mortality
- Malnutrition
- User fees that cost individuals more than they save the government

Environmental Degradation

- Dumping of toxic waste
- Selling off of natural resources to earn foreign exchange

Liberalization of the Market

- Women getting a raw deal since they do not have bargaining power equal to those of their competitors
- Dumping of second-hand clothes and shoes, which undermines local production

Agricultural Modernization

- Mounting pressure to use modern farming methods
- Increased pressure to use seed that cannot be stored in traditional storage facilities

Other common themes and analysis emerged, as well. The following were among the most repeated:

Access to decisionmaking denied: In African society, past and present, women have had little access to decisionmaking forums and institutions. This denied access is mirrored in the international financial institutions. Hence, African women have never been a part of, nor benefitted particularly from, economic policies determined by their own governments and by international donors and lenders.

Women are reaching the end of their rope: Although women are reputed for their abilities in crisis management, their tolerance, enterprise, adaptability and creativity have been tested long enough. With the launch of SAPs across Africa, the time has arrived for the African woman to challenge the heritage of national and international policies oblivious to the woman's unfavorable plight and the limits of her endurance.

African governments bear large responsibility: There was universal recognition that African governments have failed their people on the question of SAPs and economic policy generally. Rather than protecting their citizens and identifying policies that work for the majority of the population, governments have abdicated their decisionmaking role, bought into the policies of the IFIs, and betrayed their people. Women need to have the courage to confront their governments with this fact and pressure them to change.

Accountable government, not less government: As an answer to government corruption, mismanagement and lack of accountability, women see the need to increase government transparency and accountability, strengthen citizen oversight of government activities, create more participatory decisionmaking structures, and generally strengthen the capacity and duty of governments to respond to the needs of their citizens. This is in contrast to the position and actions of the World Bank and IMF, which encourage a narrowing of the role of the state to one of market facilitator, as well as secrecy in dealing with the details of economic policymaking.

More poverty, more poor women, less equity: The feminization of poverty was widely discussed, and examples were cited of the increase in single-parent families headed by women,

the weakening of state social-support systems that affect women and children more than men, and the differential responsibility of women to be providers of last resort for families. With the increased destitution of women, their struggle for equality in society is far from being addressed. An increased workload has taken its toll, giving rise to hopelessness and lack of enthusiasm in pursuing equality.

Women are subsidizing the state and the economy: Women working in the agricultural and informal sectors provide and market most of the food for national consumption. Due to the removal of subsidies, reduced welfare, added taxes, reduced purchasing power, greater unemployment, and increased competition in the informal sector, women today meet their many obligations for less remuneration. This constitutes a direct subsidy to the state and to the market.

Using our language against us: People around Africa are calling for more local control over resources, lacking faith that outsiders will manage them properly or distribute them fairly. Central governments are using these demands, however, as a pretext to shed their responsibilities to communities, while still collecting taxes and other revenues locally.

Fiscal discipline is important, but not at the expense of everything else: There is no argument that it is critical for governments to be fiscally responsible. Women do argue, however, that fiscal discipline is but one variable in a complex development equation, not an end in itself. It should be followed as a means to achieve -- and not at the expense of -- equitable and sustainable economic development.

Women need to accept power: Women must accept and use the power they have by virtue of their numbers and their role and commitment to society. Such a strategy is not without risks and will be actively discouraged by national governments and international institutions alike. It is, however, the only way for women to ensure that their priorities are addressed.

If you have to buy food, you will never have enough: Food insecurity is on the rise at both the household and national levels across Africa. Increased income from switching women's labor and land to export-crop production never materialized; indeed, family incomes have gone down as imported food prices have increased. Unless and until women's own incomes increase substantially, food prices fall, and food is widely available in local markets, increasing women's capacity to produce food for household and local consumption must be a key element of future development strategies.

Link between violence and SAPs: Increased domestic violence, rape, incest, drug abuse, crime, prostitution and ethnic and tribal conflict are among the indicators of social decay that women attribute directly to economic deprivation brought on or exacerbated by SAPs. Women are the target of most of this violence, even as they struggle to help their families.

SAPs and fundamentalism are linked: Fundamentalist forces in Africa are gaining strength among the sectors of the population that have been "cast off" into poverty and despair by adjustment programs. Under the guise of upholding culture and tradition when all else is collapsing around women, fundamentalist movements are adding religious and social servitude to the economic servitude women face already. Both Muslim and Christian women of faith, as

well as secular women, are concerned about this trend and warn against this subversion of religious and social principles.

The corruption that women are paying for is not their own: The massive debt of African nations has been accumulated and squandered without women's awareness, yet they -- and their children -- are now being forced to pay it back. As the debt is considered illegitimate, it should be canceled.

Proposed Actions and Recommendations

As striking as the common analysis of the problem among hundreds of women were the commonalities found in the proposed solutions. Both the members of the network and the broader groups of participants at the NGO Forum articulated a fairly similar list of actions to be undertaken. Educating women so that they can formulate, articulate and push for policies that address their needs and priorities emerged again and again as the most important and reliable strategy. Other proposed actions and strategies included:

- pressuring for cancellation of debt, then using funds thus generated to invest in women's production systems, especially those of small farmers and microentrepreneurs;
- conducting grassroots action research in which women define the problem to be looked at, design the questions and methodology in concert with researchers, jointly analyze the results with researchers and NGO personnel, and derive strategies from that process;
- revitalizing consciousness-raising among local populations on the utilization of public funds;
- sensitizing populations, particularly women, on the effects of SAPs;
- constituting pressure groups to denounce irresponsibility by governments and push for effective ways to hold governments and government leaders accountable to their respective nations' women.
- creating mechanisms to increase the power of the G-77 to influence decisions in finance and trade negotiations;
- attacking current economic policies up to and beyond Beijing;
- addressing IMF "trickery" that shifts blame to the countries under SAPs and claims to have included no detrimental conditionalities within its packages;
- documenting the activities of members and sharing information;
- providing support for popular education and economic literacy for poor and non-literate women;
- creating effective national and international partnerships among NGOs, researchers and fieldworkers that could

facilitate women's access to information about economic issues;

- organizing to increase women's access to resources so that they can directly and effectively address these issues within national and international decisionmaking processes;
- using the media and direct educational strategies to raise awareness about women's concerns and recommendations;
- developing and drawing on the creativity and innovation women show in devising survival strategies to inform and shape national and international economic policies; and
- maintaining contact and sharing information and strategies among women's groups and their partners vis-a-vis women and economic policy.

In addition to outlining many important strategies, the workshop participants also made several critical economic-policy recommendations. The most often-repeated of these was the cancellation of existing debt, especially in the poorest countries. In addition, there was a call to develop strategies for increasing the use of African capital to support development that is more equitable and sustainable. Finally, the need for equitable marketing systems for Third World countries was considered critical by the women at the workshop.

The recommendations from the workshop were submitted for inclusion in the Platform for Action, the official document of the Beijing Conference. Many of the participants had been involved in providing input to the Platform for Action in their respective countries. They also lobbied at the regional conference for inclusion of language that would facilitate the participation of women in the economic-policy decisionmaking process.

IV. SHAPING AWEPON TO FACE THE CHALLENGE:

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A PROGRAM OF ACTION

In response to the overwhelming interest expressed at the NGO Forum for a network to facilitate communication and action among women struggling for a voice in economic policy, and as a result of one year of groundwork carried out by a core group of women activists in Africa and their partners in the United States, the African Women's Economic Policy Network (AWEPON) was formally constituted in Dakar in November 1994.

The founding principle that underlies AWEPON's work is that women have a fundamental right to shape the economic policies under which they live.

AWEPON membership, which reflects all regions of Africa, is comprised by all the groups and

individuals that participated in the two workshops. It is open, however, to other individuals, groups and networks in civil society that are oriented towards or linked to women at the grassroots and that are actively working on women and economic-policy issues, including policy formulation. These may include student groups, labor unions, peasant associations, women's organizations, popular groups, public-policy organizations and church groups.

To ensure smooth operation, the Network's activities were organized to function from a central secretariat and four regional Focal Points that would feed information to, disseminate information from, and carry out local-level responsibilities of the membership. A steering committee was chosen to direct the continental secretariat and the four regional Focal Points representing four main language groups (Arabophone, Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone). Julia Mulaha of the National Council of Churches of Kenya was named as continental Coordinator for a period of one year.

Members further decided that because the Network was still young, and in order to include as many organizations as possible in its creation and shaping, the mandate of the focal points and coordinator would carry through to Beijing in September 1995. At that point, the nature, form and function of the Network would be re-evaluated by a group of its members and international partners and re-shaped as necessary.

AWEPON's Activities: November 1994 to February 1996

Between November 1994 and February 1996, AWEPON members carried out a variety of activities, both in their own institutional capacities and as a network. Members gained significant experience, knowledge and understanding of the opportunities and constraints facing the Network, which provided the basis for effective planning for the future.

A sampling of these activities follows:

AWEPON members have published or provided information about the Network to several publications with broad readership in Africa. This, coupled with the interest generated at the Dakar workshops, has resulted in numerous requests for information, assistance and membership.

In June, AWEPON, Third World Network and ENDA/Senegal co-sponsored a meeting in Accra, Ghana to prepare a statement for the Global Coalition for Africa meeting held that month. Seven AWEPON members attended and also met to discuss the draft report of the Dakar meeting, reconfirm the structure of the network, and discuss activities beyond Beijing.

In mid-July 1995, the Mother's Union of the Church of Uganda (an AWEPON member) and The Development GAP planned and hosted a visit to Uganda by the World Bank's Chief Economist for Africa. Two meetings were held. The first was in Lira, in the northern part of Uganda, where over one hundred women from several regions, some of whom walked 60 miles to attend the meeting, described to the economist the everyday reality of their lives. The second was a three-day Economic Literacy Workshop attended by the economist and 30 women from eastern Uganda. In response to the women's concerns that, despite the very useful sharing of information

and perspectives during the workshop, there would be no change in World Bank policies, the economist agreed to conduct a follow-up meeting to report on how the Bank was addressing gender issues, especially vis-a-vis structural adjustment. To date, such a follow-up meeting has yet to take place.

In late July, 12 AWEAPON members were invited to a week-long meeting on Economic Justice, held in South Africa and sponsored by the World Council of Churches. Members had a chance to meet and work with WCC partners from around the world.

Several AWEAPON members attended the Beijing conference as representatives of AWEAPON, and another eight or so members attended in their own institutional capacities. They provided a strong articulation of economic-policy issues as they relate to women in a number of workshops and panel discussions and assisted in producing a press release during the governmental meetings, pointing to the attending governments' refusal to deal with the ways in which economic policy exacerbates poverty. Members were able to meet briefly as a group and individually during the course of the NGO Forum and official meetings. Each member at the AWEAPON meeting agreed to write a one-to-two-page description of their perceptions and experiences in Beijing, to be shared with all members in the Network. In addition, it was agreed that a funding proposal be prepared on the basis of the work done during the summer and circulated to members for their input and to ensure accountability and transparency within the Network. In Beijing, AWEAPON members each reconfirmed their commitment to and enthusiasm for working within and strengthening the Network.

AWEAPON members were also invited to represent the Network at other official forums, such as the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and donor meetings in Addis Ababa in September, as well as the Special Programs of Adjustment meeting of bilateral donors in Ottawa in October. Several members also attended meetings of the U.S. 50 Years Is Enough Campaign held in October 1995 in Washington, where they were able to link up with other groups engaged in similar struggles around the world.

BEIJING, THE WORLD BANK, AND AFRICAN WOMEN

During the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, the NGOs' Caucus for Economic Justice focused on opening discussions between women's organizations and the World Bank concerning the negative effects of structural adjustment policies on gender equality. Through the ensuing dialogue, the caucus pushed for greater participation of women's groups in all aspects of Bank policy, a stronger gender perspective in resource allotment, and a commitment to global economic, gender and racial justice. While the caucus represents the opinions of

women worldwide, the positions of the African women's NGOs must be considered in order to establish region-specific responses that incorporate the historical, political and economic experience of the current gender crisis.

While the World Bank has asserted a commitment to the requests of the Beijing caucus for a more gender-sensitive approach to policy, it has not changed its assumptions, models or economic-policy orientations. By allotting a greater amount of funds to women's organizations and projects, the Bank is avoiding the issues related to its role in the cycles of poverty, marginalization and dependency that affect the majority of African women.

The IFIs must evaluate their past programs in order to establish sustainable future programs in Africa. Instead of focusing on policies that aim for competition in the industrialized market, the IFIs must ensure that ideas, policies and programs are assessed and accepted by those who suffer the most from deprivation. Since foreign debt heavily burdens African economies, lending programs should consider the implications of the debt cycle and, since most foreign debt is owed to bilateral institutions and governments instead of private banks, debt cancellation should be a priority for African nations. Unilaterally imposed structural adjustment that is biased against the interests of the broader local society should be replaced by reciprocal adjustment which better allows for discrepancies in resource distribution between industrialized and developing nations. Above all, policy should not weaken the state of African nations and should consider civil society as a working partner in negotiations concerning economic reform.

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Putting AWEPON on Firm Footing

As foreseen at the founding meeting of the Network, 13 AWEPON members came together in March 1996, for a five-day planning meeting hosted by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches to assess the progress of AWEPON, chart its future, and prepare a funding proposal to obtain the resources necessary to function as a network. Based on their experiences over the previous 18 months, all of the members present resoundingly confirmed the need for and importance of AWEPON.

The participants assessed the goals and objectives of AWEPON as determined in Dakar, as well as its structure and effectiveness, reaffirming much of the work done there. Structures and objectives were reshaped where necessary to face new realities. Participants also outlined a three-year plan of action and a budget and appointed Hellen Wangusa of the Church of Uganda Women's Department as the interim coordinator, with the expectation that when funding is available she would become the full-time, salaried staff director of AWEPON.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the Network is to create a forum for analysis, discussion and dissemination of information about existing lobbying and advocacy capacity of women, particularly women at the grassroots, to influence and shape economic policy at all levels. More specifically, the objectives of the Network are to:

- create a forum where groups working on economic issues can link up and work together to share experiences from local, national and international levels;
- strengthen the capacity of members and their partners at the grassroots to analyze, critique and build alternatives to current economic policies through research, training, popular education and information sharing; and
- strengthen women's capacity to influence policy at the national and international level by developing their lobbying and advocacy skills in order to ensure that women's needs and concerns become central in the decisionmaking processes of pertinent institutions.

Structure

The Network will be governed by a Steering Committee, within which there will be several committees to target activities such as management and fundraising. As provisionally established in November 1994, the Network will have one main coordinating secretariat and four coordinators for the Anglophone, Francophone, Arabophone and Lusophone Focal Points. The Steering Committee will consist of:

- the Network Coordinator,

- the four Focal Point coordinators,
- one additional member per region, defined by language group
- two men who are actively involved with gender and/or economic-policy issues

The Steering Committee will set policy for AWEPON, highlight important issues and develop the means to address them. It will also appraise the work of the Network Coordinator and deal with legal issues and accountability. The term of office for the Focal Point Coordinators will be four years, while the rest of the Steering Committee members will serve for three years.

The Management Committee will consist of five members and will oversee the work of the secretariat and the other activities undertaken by AWEPON. It will deal with emergencies and maintain fiduciary accountability. The Network Coordinator will be the secretary to that committee, and her term of office will be three years.

There will be three members on the Fundraising Committee, with the Network Coordinator serving as an ex-officio member. This committee will help fundraise by identifying funders, approving a fundraising strategy, and relating directly with funders, where appropriate.

The Network Coordinator will ensure implementation of AWEPON's action plan. She will report to the Steering Committee, ensure AWEPON's representation at international meetings, and facilitate networking. She will also coordinate the Focal Points, facilitate regular meetings of the Steering Committee, organize training, coordinate research, and disseminate results of activities, lessons learned and materials.

Through outreach to groups, the Focal Point Coordinators will develop the Network at the sub-regional level, collect available data on the macroeconomic policies of the sub-regions, and strategize with national groups to monitor the political and economic situation in each country. In addition, they will also facilitate networking in each country of the sub-region by identifying new groups, linking with existing members, and informing the central office through quarterly reports.

The Network will explore incorporation as an NGO during its first year of operation. In the meantime, AWEPON is negotiating with Third World Network and other organizations regarding fiscal sponsorship.

Membership

Eligible for membership in the Network will be:

individuals and groups in civil society -- including student groups, labor unions, public-policy organizations and church groups -- that are oriented towards or linked to

women at the grassroots and that are working on gender and economic-policy issues;

- regional networks, like Third World Network, ENDA, WILDAF and DAWN, working on gender and economic-policy issues;
- women in the diaspora, who will be given associate membership if they are actively involved or interested in AWEAPON's work; and
- both men and women who support AWEAPON's aims and objectives, with membership reflecting all regions of Africa.

There will be two types of membership: membership for individuals, organizations and networks that want to be actively involved in AWEAPON's activities; and membership for those who want to receive information only. The conditions for membership in the network will be payment of membership fees and support of AWEAPON's objectives. Fees will be determined as follows: small, local grassroots organizations at US\$50 per year; national NGOs at US\$100 per year; and regional networks and NGOs at US\$200 per year. International friends and supporters of AWEAPON will be asked for donations.

Fundraising

AWEAPON will develop a fundraising strategy. The Network will also identify potential donors to whom grant requests will be made. Other expected sources of funding will be contributions from members and donations from foundations and individuals.

Mechanism of Networking

The networking method will be horizontal linkage between various points. Communication will be facilitated through print, electronic media, traditional forms of communication (folk media) and joint programs of actions. The research findings will be shared, and there will be joint participation in action research and documentation.

Outreach

The final report of any AWEAPON meeting or activity will be widely disseminated. A brochure and an accompanying letter from the Coordinator, together with such reports, will be circulated to all participants of the meeting, policymakers, member groups and individuals, associates and other interested parties that will be identified. AWEAPON will also put together a newsletter and other publications for sale.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Reports will be submitted to donors as required. In addition, there will be a mid-term external

evaluation by the Steering Committee and a final evaluation by funders and implementors at the end of each program, activity or funding season.

AWEPON's Future Work

A three-year action plan was devised by the participants to respond to priorities that have been expressed by women at all of the economic-policy meetings to date.

The first is the need for *economic literacy* for both the broader constituencies with whom AWEPON members work and for members themselves. A three-phase program has been planned:

Members will gather information on economic literacy, analyze it, and, using their own experience and an analysis of other economic-literacy plans, develop a draft economic-literacy curriculum targeted to African women.

The AWEPON Coordinator will work with The Development GAP, the Inter-Church Coalition on Africa, the U.S. 50 Years Is Enough Network, the All African Council of Churches, and a variety of other U.S., Canadian, Haitian and Latin American groups to organize an international workshop. The groups will meet for 7-10 days to share methodologies, exchange ideas and put together a core curriculum of existing materials and methodologies that can be used broadly for popular education in economics in a variety of settings. It is expected that this meeting will take place by the end of 1996. AWEPON members will spend two additional days planning an inter-African outreach strategy to ensure that interested groups around the continent have access to the curriculum.

Phase three of the economic-literacy program will be dedicated to establishing a methodology for training trainers in the use of the curriculum.

The second priority of the Network is *building women's capacity to undertake action research and policy analysis as a key element of building a viable alternative to SAPs*. To increase women's ability to play a key role in policymaking, AWEPON will work with women to formulate the questions they want answered about economic policy, then use action research to get some answers.

As a first step, AWEPON members will analyze and compare three alternatives documents: the DAWN alternative presented in Beijing; the African alternative to SAPs developed by the Economic Commission for Africa; and alternatives emanating from Latin America and summarized in The Development GAP's publication, Forum on Democratic Alternatives to Structural Adjustment in the Americas. They will be analyzed for gender content, as well as for how well they address gender issues and processes.

As part of the exercise, AWEPON will engage networks such as DAWN, AAWARD and Third World Network, which have long histories in research and policy analysis. The specific objective of AWEPON's work, however, will be to develop tools that can be used by women at the grassroots to analyze and critique the policies that affect them every day.

A third priority is *advocacy and outreach*, which includes a focus on the media. As a first step, the regional coordinators will receive training, from member groups where appropriate, in how to deal with the media so as to "get their story out." In addition, AWEAPON members (and colleagues) will share strategies used to address the policies of local and national governments and international institutions, as well as for bringing the broader public into policy debates.

So as to keep members and colleagues informed about the Network's progress, as well as about fast-breaking issues related to women and economic policy and about opportunities for joint work, AWEAPON will produce a short, quarterly newsletter in French, Portuguese and English.

The three years of work by AWEAPON members will culminate in the formulation of alternative economic-policy proposals and recommendations, their presentation to the relevant authorities in each country, as well as to the IFIs, and a report to be widely disseminated throughout Africa and abroad.

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AFRICAN WOMAN

*Day is breaking in Africa
Light is emerging through misty clouds
Early morning birds are singing
Night is fading through window shutters
Light is swallowing darkness*

*Centuries left African woman dormant,
In silence she saw governments rise and fall
In silence she noticed prosperity flow to
poverty
In silence she saw her nations move to decay*

*Is there hope for the African woman?
Will next century meet her asleep?*

*Will sun and moon delay their course for her
to move?*

*Will tides stop rising and ebbing for her to
shake?*

*Will mango trees stop flowering for her to
raise her head?*

*African woman is up from slumber,
And realizes the emptiness around her.
The forest is empty.*

*Parrots, snakes, monkeys and apes are gone,
Gigantic milk trees that gave suck to her
babies are gone*

*Children, her only hope, are
blasted by grenade balls in cities*

While others are gone to war

*Gone, gone, never to return (Wiyooo, wiyooo,
she cries)*

Mothers of Africa arise

Crawl out of self and speak out

Weep for your bleeding continent

Weep for your decaying nations

Death is in your communities

Monster structural adjustment will not help

The gong is sounding

Come out and take firm steps

Give directions to your communities

Fear not, you are not alone

*For none can stop a river from flowing to the
sea.*

By Grace Eneme

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ANNEX I: AWEAPON Members

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ANNEX II: SELECTED PROFILES OF AWEAPON MEMBERS

Ghana: The Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC)

ISODEC was founded in the mid-1980s to address the fulfillment of the basic needs of impoverished rural and urban communities, paying particular attention to issues of gender equality. While ISODEC continues to work directly with the community, it has broadened its function to include research, policy, and advocacy work. Through this capacity, it has created a research and advocacy-oriented gender unit in collaboration with the Regional Secretariat of the Third World Network (TWN). The gender unit is currently contributing to TWN's response to the latest World Bank Report on SAPs as well as providing support in the preparatory processes of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the Social Summit in Copenhagen.

Kenya: The National Council of Churches of Kenya Women's Programme

The Women's Programme of NCCCK works to raise public awareness of women's accomplishments, struggles, hopes and concerns. Its willingness to challenge the church community and the public to be supportive of women's concerns has made it a leading advocate in Kenya for the human, social and economic rights of women. Activities of the women's program include: workshops and seminars on economic literacy, health, food security, child survival, violence against women and gender awareness; leadership development; study and exchange visits; strengthening regional women's groups; and creating educational resource materials which relate to issues affecting women.

The Women's Programme places particular emphasis on economic literacy for women, using a participatory learning approach. It has held workshops across the country to enable women to understand how the IMF and World Bank operate, how the structural adjustment programs of these institutions affect their lives, and how they can challenge church leaders and decisionmakers to advocate for sustainable and pro-poor activities.

Additionally, The Programme has been active in bringing its message to Washington D.C. The Director attended the October 1993 African Women's Economic Policy meeting in Washington and did extensive work with The Development GAP concerning gender issues in Africa. While in Washington, the Director also met with members of Congress and the media to discuss the impact of SAPs on African women.

Kenya: The Young Women's Christian Association of Kenya (YWCA)

Founded in 1912, the mission of the YWCA is to bring women of various ethnic groups, denominations and social backgrounds together in an effort to fight ignorance and poverty. The YWCA works closely with the Government of Kenya and other organizations in promoting programs that aim to raise the status of women. Through national training programs in leadership skills, advocacy and civic education, it addresses constraints to women's advancement. Affiliated with NCCCK, the YWCA has over 10,000 members in Kenya and maintains a wide network locally, regionally and internationally.

Mali: Institute of Popular Education

The Institute of Popular Education is composed of adult educators committed to participatory research and interactive learning methodologies that reinforce community initiatives for change. It supports fieldworkers, trainers and grassroots educators in their efforts to help communities become informed, educated and aware about development issues that affect them, including structural adjustment, and thus able to direct and control their own development. It is currently developing an education program in national languages that is based on participatory teaching methods and learner-generated material. Ongoing activities include community/popular education and research on literacy and public education campaigns.

Nigeria: Development Education Center (DEC)

DEC provides programs in health, education, food and shelter to supplement those that were cut as a result of SAPs. Projects include one in which engineers design tools and methods for greater agricultural output. Another self-help project organizes women to produce domestic washing soaps and creams. DEC offers literacy classes to women and their families hoping that they will gain an awareness of what is happening in their country. In addition, its health extension workers advise rural couples on family planning.

Senegal: Association for the Promotion of Senegalese Women (APROFES)

APROFES supports women's groups and cooperatives in a variety of sectors, including sustainable agriculture, family planning, community health, environmental protection and income generation, as well as in the provision of credit, training, and appropriate technology. APROFES is also working with grassroots groups on analyzing the effects of adjustment (high cost of living, degradation of social services, unemployment, and the impoverishment of the population) and has conducted research with women in the Kaolack region to study the effects of adjustment on women. APROFES has formed a theater troupe of young artists which uses plays, music and dance to conscientize women at the base and enable reflection and analysis of the problems they face under structural adjustment.

Senegal: Women's Collective for the Defense of the Family (COFDEF)

COFDEF contributes to the positive transformation of society in Senegal by protecting the rights of women as individuals and as family planners. Formed in 1993 in reaction to yet another round of austerity measures imposed on the people of Senegal, the Collective shares information about the effects of adjustment policies on women and families, and provides a forum around which women can influence national macroeconomic policies. Attempting to find viable alternatives to structural adjustment programs is of primary importance to COFDEF. In March 1994, COFDEF worked with affiliated groups in the Thies region to develop a discussion forum on development issues, including structural adjustment.

Uganda: Church of Uganda Women's Desk

Since 1989, the Church of Uganda Women's Desk has sought to create awareness concerning the impact of SAPs on women and the family. In addition, it aims to explore possible alternatives for economic survival while creating a national and international network to facilitate exchange visits and programs. Toward these ends, the Church of Uganda Women's Desk has: hosted church groups from Canada and Kenya; assisted in research and documentation efforts addressing women and SAPs in Uganda, Ghana, and Zambia; hosted the first Economic Literacy Workshop; and participated in the Uganda Women's Network's Structural Adjustment Programs Workshop in June of 1994.

Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN)

The Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre was established in 1990 to enhance the position of Zimbabwean women through the collection and dissemination of materials on women and development. It collects information from local and international NGOs, as well as from

governments and international institutions, and repackages and translates this information for use by grassroots women as well as policymakers and researchers. The Centre also facilitates debates and provides a platform to discuss current women-in-development issues in Zimbabwe with policymakers and beneficiaries and conducts gender awareness training for local organizations.

Zimbabwe: Women's Desk of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches Women's Program conducts economic-literacy training workshops to strengthen women's understanding of economics and give them the confidence to discuss and teach others about structural adjustment programs. The program is developing a training manual, based upon a participatory learning model, that will enable non-literate women to build from their knowledge of the household and local economy towards an understanding of the international economy. The goal of this program is to empower women to keep their local communities free of economic exploitation and increase their influence on the economic policymaking process. The Women's Desk is also involved in training community women in the preservation of food, as well as techniques concerning grain storage. These activities are promoted as business ventures to assist these women in their efforts to generate income.

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The African Women's Economic Policy Network (AWEPON) works to increase women's understanding of the content and impact of economic policy while promoting the participation of grassroots women in economic decisionmaking. It consists of organizations and programs across the African continent. For more information on individual and organizational membership, please contact Hellen Wangusa, c/o the Church of Uganda.

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