

Global Citizens' Network Built around SAP Review

The civil-society network supporting the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) with the World Bank is steadily growing in size and diversity. Known as SAPRIN, the Network unites a broad range of groups that have been, often separately, fighting against and/or suffering under structural adjustment programs.

The SAPRI exercise emerged from NGO discussions with World Bank President James Wolfensohn and marks the first time that the World Bank has accepted a challenge from civil-society organizations to assess the impact of structural adjustment programs from a grassroots perspective. The core of the assessment, expected to run over an 18-month period, will be exercises in ten countries, in which local civil-society organizations will take the lead with Bank and government officials. (See BankCheck No.15, September 1996.)

Eighty percent of the 220 groups in SAPRIN are from 50 countries in the global South. More than 25 percent of SAPRIN members are labor unions striving to have a say in the formulation of economic policies including prospective labor-market reforms and privatizations. Labor unions continue to sign onto the Initiative, due largely to the active involvement in the Network of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and Public Services International (PSI).

Other Network members include churches and religious orders, women's, business and farmers' associations, and environmental organizations, as well as a number of members of national legislatures.

The range evident in SAPRIN membership demonstrates the profound disquiet brought about by structural adjustment programs across social, economic, political and geographical spectrums.

This message is not lost on officials at the World Bank, who find that they are dealing with not just a few dozen NGOs, but rather a coalition of organizations that represent millions of people worldwide.

SAPRIN members vary in their degree of participation in the Network, from simply receiving updates on the progress of the Initiative, to disseminating information and recruiting new Network members, to contributing ideas on the various political and technical processes underway. Members work directly to inform and involve their local citizenry in SAPRI exercises, which will formally begin following an international forum scheduled for early 1997.

Negotiations continue between the Bank and SAPRIN's steering committee regarding the selection and approval of participating countries. El Salvador, Ghana, Mali, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh have agreed to join the Initiative. Ecuador and either the Philippines or Cambodia are also likely participants. The governments of Mexico and Hungary have refused to permit the proposed SAP assessments to be held in their countries. And the Bank's Latin America department has decided not to request Argentina's involvement, a point of contention

for SAPRI, which believes that the global review should include at least one major Latin American emerging market.

Meanwhile, the growth of the Network signals the potential for a broad-based global network beyond SAPRI itself. Organizers hope to reach a goal of 1,000 network group members uniting North and South, East and West, women and men, wage earners and farmers in the fight against the imposition of structural adjustment.

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