REPORT OF THE AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM IN NAIROBI, KENYA ON 15TH TO 16TH OCTOBER 2001

AN AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY POSITION TO THE AFRICAN MINISTERIAL PREPCOM IN PREPARATION TO THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, JOHANNESBURG, SEPTEMBER 2002

INTRODUCTION

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) takes place at a time of serious environmental, political, social, and economic crisis for Africa, and indeed for the world in general.

After years of unrestricted abuse of the environment, pollution, erosion of biodiversity and skewed development in favour of the north, we now face the prospects of serious environmental disaster. Global warming, climate change, accelerated deforestation and desertification, and the pollution of oceans and communities manifest this. This crisis poses a threat to millions of livelihoods and indeed to life itself on earth.

The environmental crisis now threatening our future is as a result of the accelerated social devastation now gripping our continent and the world. Hunger, poverty and diseases are on the increase, unemployment, inequality within and between nations has widened, and social tensions are on the rise. On the other hand, environmental degradation in turn compounds the impoverishment of the African people.

Economic crisis, stagnation and sometimes disintegration of African economies have now become a permanent feature of our landscape in Africa. Years of externally imposed structural adjustment programmes have failed to deliver the promise of growth and development. To the contrary, African terms of trade have worsened; we face accelerated de-industrialisation and the continents economic infrastructure is deteriorating rapidly. External debt continues to be a crushing burden on the African economies and people. More resources now flow out of the continent in excess of investment flows into the continent. The promise made in Rio of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) equal to 0.7% of the GDP of developed countries has never been realised

While we are convinced that the crisis of our continent is not fully of our own making, we point out the important fact that a long history of autocratic governments, corruption, greed, patronage and violation of human rights by the ruling elites has contributed to the crisis now being faced by the continent. The lack of prioritisation for resource allocation is cause for concern. Rising social tensions and the self-interests of the ruling elites and foreign commercial interests have fuelled the continent's wars. Insecurity, political and social instability have deepened Africa's environmental and development crisis.

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We acknowledge that it has become crucial for Africa to recognise the relationship between security, human development and the environment in our continent. It is however equally important for us to recognise that issues of security and the environment are inextricably intertwined with those of democratic governance. Security and the restoration of the integrity of the environment cannot be realised without democratic and participatory government.

Whereas the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 represented brave and laudable attempts to address the twin challenges of poverty and ecological disasters, the world's leaders have failed to rise to the challenge. Lack of implementation, *meagre* resource allocation, unequal allocation of resources between north and the south, and the absence of political will, have undermined the promise of the Earth Summit.

We note that the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) is being promoted as a path of sustainable development for Africa. We draw attention to the fact the NEPAD did not emerge out of a process of consultation that involved all aspects of civil society. This goes against a culture and practice of participatory democracy.

The forces of globalization that have shaped the world and our continent in the last decades have deepened and entrenched poverty, marginalised peoples and nations, and accelerated ecological disintegration. This globlisation process has entrenched unequal power relationships between the north and south and has undermined the sovereignty of African nations.

OBSTACLES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA.

In the midst of this crisis, African peoples and governments have faced formidable obstacles in their attempts to promote sustainable development and in the implementation of Agenda 21. The following are some of the problems:

1.   Lack of financial resources.
2.   Lack of human resource capacity to implement Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and Agenda 21.
3.   Commitments and conventions relating to agenda 21 are not legally binding.
4.   Lack of technology and knowledge transfer from the north to the south as a result of restrictions placed by new trade regimes e.g. the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs)
5.   Decision-making in the international governance system is skewed against Africa and other poor countries.
6.   Unfavorable economic and trade conditions imposed by the World Bank, IMF and WTO.
7.   High external debt and debt service costs
8.   Poor governance (lack of democratic government, human rights abuse and corruption)
9.   Inter and intra state conflicts and wars

10. Increase in HIV/AIDs
11. Food insecurity
12. Desertification
13. Poverty (e.g. 60 000 per day get poorer in Africa)
14. Unemployment (lack of quality jobs, loss of skills)
15. Mining exploration and exploitation (e.g. inequitable distribution of mineral wealth and lack of mining policies)
16. Pollution (even at community levels)
17. Lack of basic services (water, health services, education, electricity, and public transport)
18. Lack of access to information and public participation
19. Biotechnology (leading to loss of biodiversity, food production for small scale farmers and loss of indigenous knowledge)
20. Lack of homegrown macro economic policies
21. Lack of sustainable agriculture (pastoralism, chemicals)
22. Somalia situation, where there is no national government.
23. Lack of political will to implement environmental conventions
24. Trade barriers (access to market, terms of trade,
25. Trade in small arms on the continent
26. Environmental degradation and pollution (exploitation of marine resources, desertification, and deforestation), even at community levels
27. North not implementing environmental agreements in Africa

THE AFRICA (CIVIL SOCIETY) COMMON POSITION

Mindful of the crisis facing the continent and the obstacles that stand in the way of the implementation of Agenda 21, we call upon the African governments to unite with their people and rise to the challenges facing Africa today. We note with concern that the Draft African Ministerial Statement – "Towards a New Culture of International Partnership" - to be discussed in Nairobi on 17 to 18 October 2001 has serious omissions and oversights. We call on the Ministers to take practical action and to incorporate the following proposals in the African Common Position to the WSSD:

1. The need to put HIV/AIDS high on Africa's agenda and in particular to allocate sufficient resources to fight this scourge. Patent laws need to be reviewed in order to facilitate access to medication.

2. Africa's debt must be cancelled immediately - it is not enough to call for lower debt service costs and debt reduction.

3. African governments must take responsibility for the delivery of public goods and services (social and environment) and protection thereof. Prioritisation of needs is essential. Privatisation of all services is an abdication of responsibility.

4. Government must develop programmes for poverty eradication, which should include access to land for the landless, food security, decent work, etc.

5. African governments must commit themselves to systems of participatory democracy and eradicating corruption. This means a culture and practice that ensures access to information, justice, and rights to participate in all aspects of decision-making, by launching a negotiation process leading to the adoption of the binding instrument guaranteeing the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration.

6. Organised labour must be involved in any effort to change production and consumption patterns
This also means mainstreaming the major marginalised groups like youth, women, pastoralists, disabled and indigenous people.

7. The process of globalisation that is currently underway is a threat to sustainable development. African governments must unite with their people, and with other progressive forces all over the world to combat globalisation and its effects.

8. African governments must commit themselves to join with their people to develop a pan- African model of development.
These models must include the adoption of measures to end financial speculation, like the Tobin Tax.

9. African leaders and governments must recognise civil society as partners, and initiate a process of forming strategic alliances with forces from other parts of the world that are committed to a people-centered development.

10. Mobilise to resolve all wars and conflict on the continent and mobilise for democratic governments and governance.

11. Although youth form the majority on the continent, it is of concern that youth issues have been omitted in the African Ministerial position. Governments must recognise and acknowledge the role of young people. Governments must create and enhance mechanisms for greater involvement of young people in all aspects of sustainable development. Youth must also be seen as instrumental in promoting peace in areas of civil strife.

12. Call on all African governments to open up discussions on NEPAD immediately by involve civil society, organised labour and other major groups

13. Processes to clean up and care for the environment should involve all organs of civil society.

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14. Africa must develop and implement Codes of Conduct for the utilisation of the natural resources of the continent. These Codes of Conduct must develop and promote the use of non-market means of valuing the continent's natural resources. All existing policies should also conform to the Codes of Conduct.

15. We note with concern that the Draft Ministerial Statement does not address the special developmental needs of Small Islands States, Somalia and others. This is a grave omission, and the African Common Position needs to address this issue.

16. We recognise that existing trade regimes are skewed in favour of the north and multi-national corporations (MNCs), which has resulted in the collapse of commodities prices and has created other problems. Government must call for trade regimes that will protect the development needs of the Africa and encourage pan African trade and improvement of cross border infrastructure.

17. Governments must ratify international conventions and immediately develop national strategies/regulations for the implementation and enforcement of conventions, such as the Biosafety Convention, The Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), Kyoto Protocol, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention, including codes on intellectual property rights.

18. African government must develop strategies and codes to facilitate the transfer of environment friendly technologies on terms favourable to the development of Africa. The existing technology and knowledge regimes must be changed.

19. The south must be proactive in setting its own environmental agenda, rather than being reactive to the global agenda.

COMMITMENTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

As Civil Society, we commit to:

1. Work with government as partners in sustainable development

2. Strengthen civil society through networking and information sharing

3. Forming partnerships with other role players in sustainable development

4. Promote professionalism amongst all Civil Society

5. Better co-ordinate Civil Society involvement

6. Promote cross-pollination of diverse Civil Society organisations

CONCLUSION

The restoration of the dignity of the African people requires that Africa end her dependency on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These institutions have brought untold harm to the continent and her people, and have played a singular role in the impoverishment of the African continent.

We welcome an acknowledgement in the ministerial statement that Gender inequality is an obstacle to sustainable development. Africa must translate this acknowledgement into a real commitment by allocating sufficient resources to the promotion of gender equality, and immediately address the serious lag in gender mainstreaming at all levels.

The WSSD should be used as benchmarks for governments to establish key performance indicators to commit themselves to implement safe minimum living standards necessary for ensuring quality of life and environmental quality for all, especially the poor.

A decade of INACTION IS OVER

It is now time for ACTION!!

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