

Symposium on Economic Insecurity in Africa
Cotonou, 24-25 May 2002
Summary of Conclusions

1 PURPOSE

The meeting was designed to bring together researchers and policy makers from the West African region to examine the issues and concerns related to economic insecurity and human security.

The Centre Pan African de Prospective Sociale (CPPS) and the UNDP (Millennium Africa Project) together with the Commission on Human Security jointly convened the Symposium.

2 PARTICIPANTS

Approximately 45-55 participants attended the various sessions over the two days. They represented both civil and society and governments with a number of university-based academic researchers (names and details on participants are attached to the Draft Report of the Meeting and will be available later).

3 PROGRAMME

The agenda was focused economic activity and livelihood security and their impacts on human security. The participants had rigorous discussions on the historical antecedents and processes that shaped Africa's current development path and resulting economic insecurity and exclusion from the processes and benefits of this phase of economic globalization.

4 ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Taken together the debates and views of the participants emphasized the relationships between economic insecurity, issues of good governance, the impacts of economic liberalization on states and the effects on poor people, particularly women, children, and those whose health and education are compromised everyday.

Issues related to trade, pricing, employment and how these are influenced by global, regional and national institutional arrangements of economic global governance were also discussed.

Building state capacity and that of political leaders to understand the new threats and vulnerabilities and the process of negotiating policy from an informed position within regional and global processes were highlighted.

Education as a polity intervention to address the human resource deficits in the region as well as to promote human development at an individual and collective level was stressed as a vital priority.

Ongoing conflicts and political destabilization with their impacts on people and the potential for human security in the region were also discussed.

The need to mobilize resources at national and international levels to promote human security through education, health care, employment creation, entrepreneurial development and social infrastructure development underpinned the discussions.

Participants were keen to explore the possibilities of human security as a new way of putting Africa's concerns back on the international agenda. Moreover, while existing initiatives in Africa particularly that of NEPAD, are seen to have the potential to promote a revitalized vision for Africa's development, participants were of the view that certain aspects could be strengthened. The need to ensure that the process facilitate relationships with civil society and the diverse issues in national and sub-regional contexts was raised as specific concerns.

5 SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Sub-regional network and sharing on human security

The Cotonou Symposium prompted the sharing of concerns, experiences and analyses among participants in West Africa. These exchanges have taken place in an atmosphere of realism, pragmatism and sincerity. Discussions were engaged under the premises of a pan African vision where economic and human security will be gradually reduced to benefit the people of Africa. The debates will have contributed in this way to the work of the Commission on Human Security.

5.2 Historical and Global Context

The historical context (slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism), the effects of which are still being felt and the globalization confronting Africa have contradictory impacts and have affected in the past and continue to influence today the terms of economic and human security in Africa.

5.3 Good Governance

Economic insecurity and democratic insecurity are interlinked and mutually supportive. The emergence of individual initiatives and creativity are undermined by the lack of recognition of Africa's culture and the importance of democratic participation. Democracy, with its universal values and virtues, was seen as an ideal to which there is no cheap substitute. It provides a favorable environment for the political and economic maturation of the citizen. It also requires the emergence and full exercise of checks and balances within civil society as well as government. Dealing with issues of poverty and inequality and the need for strong, accountable processes of governance required the promotion of an educated, informed middle class.

Critical to the process of democratization and accountable, transparent governance is building the capacity and leadership of politicians and policy-makers at all levels. Such capacity building processes, through training and education would help to increase awareness of best practices as well as promote monitoring and good governance at appropriate levels.

Good governance goals to address human insecurity in the region are many and could include:

Acquire and promote an African vision, ensure equity in resource sharing and power, promote peace and prevent conflict, ensure the macroeconomic fundamentals for poverty reduction, lead the sectoral programmes aimed at diversifying the resource base and encouraging the creation of national added value for exportation, maintain transparency, reduce/remove social exclusion, promote gender equity, protect the environment, etc.

Local development is an essential dimension of governance as it frees village communities' energies, permits the establishment of neighborhood mechanisms such as micro finance schemes and promotes industrial processing of local products.

5.4 Human Resources Development

Education, both formal and popular education at all levels of society, is an integral part of capacity building. The absence or lack of educational opportunities due to a number of factors such as cut backs on social expenditure and the out migration of human capital has contributed to economic and human insecurity both at the individual and collective level. A new emphasis on education backed by effective channeling of resources is required to develop a knowledge-based economy. It requires however to be accompanied by an "enculturation" as a re-rooting as well as an opening process. It must benefit first and foremost the main victims of insecurity, i.e. women and children.

Health is an important factor for development and strengthening of human capital. Fighting HIV/AIDS, a major cause of human and economic insecurity which is also threatening the survival of certain African nations, must be the top priority of insecurity reduction programmes. Priority should be given also to the most vulnerable group: women and children. Issues that impede adequate and appropriate public health interventions to address new and old threats such as HIV/AIDS and other chronic illness include health infrastructure (clinics, communications systems, staff and other resources) and the access to affordable medicines and treatment.

5.5 Confidence Building and Trust

Issues of corruption and abuse of economic and political power need to be addressed in order to promote human security. Individual and collective trust is considered an essential element of social capital and key to understanding and launching programmes against economic and human insecurity. It is reinforced by education and the re-appropriation of significant cultural values. Furthermore, trust, based on transparent accountable processes of governance underpinned by a rights-based culture that is supportive of human development creates an environment which favors investment.

5.6 Regional Cooperation

Despite the numerous, multiform and not always conclusive experiences of economic sub-regional and regional integration, such an approach remains valid to ensure a process that would make optimal use of limited technical and human resources to fight economic and

human insecurity.

5.7 Resource Mobilization

Internal resource mobilization in African countries is more than ever necessary to increase self-financing and mitigate the adverse effects and the precariousness of development assistance.

International cooperation which is still indispensable to reduce human and economic insecurity in Africa should be **for** development and not **to** development.

A mechanism should be introduced for the benefit of African countries, allowing partners to commit themselves and countries to establish their plans on the basis of confirmed resources.