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AFFAIRS**

**Evolving a Sustainable Social Dimension for ECOWAS
Regional Integration Programme**

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**Defining Social Development within the Context and Challenges of
globalisation**

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This paper covers:

- **global economics and social policy;**
- **Copenhagen and beyond**
- **Moving from global to regional development**
- **national and regional economics and social policy;**
- **The current reality of civil society intervention in national and regional policies**
- **Regional Social Policy agendas**
- **Lessons from other regions**
- **Civil society influence in regions**
- **Possibilities for Cooperation**

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you during this important Conference. My invitation asked that I present a Paper on ***Defining Social Development within the Context and Challenges of Globalisation***. ICSW feels very strongly that civil society participation in regional social development is crucial for the people of our countries. For this reason we support the Theme for this Conference, "***Evolving a Sustainable Social Dimension for ECOWAS Regional Integration Programme***" and would value working with ECOWAS from this time onwards.

Global economics and social policy

Globalisation is proving to be a challenge for social policy. The global economic institutions including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have consistently promoted a macro economic policy of neoliberalism¹. The global South does not believe it can outweigh the influence on these institutions by the global North. "The south claims the north is co-opting international organizations to their interests, and the north criticizes the south for giving low priority to a progressive social agenda, making it very difficult to find a compromise agreement."¹

In contrast to global macro economic policy there is no consistency in social policy at a global level. Within the UN there are multiple agencies working in social policy and social development. In addition, outside the UN there are influential agencies including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and a myriad of international non government organisations providing direct service and advocacy. There is no one social policy to bind them. On the other hand macro economists are committed largely to a philosophy of neoliberalism.

It is unlikely that global institutions with a remit for social development will arrive at a consistent macro social policy. I do not expect to see the major financial institutions revise their macro economic commitments and move away from neoliberal policies. I do not expect to see a reconstruction of the UN and related agencies to become a major coherent force in social development. Attempts by the UN to review their relations with civil

¹ Deacon B, Ortiz I, Zelenev S (2007) *Regional Social Policy* DESA Working Paper No. 37 Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York.
<http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers>

society have failed. The opportunity for those interested in a social development agenda lies at national and regional levels.

Copenhagen and beyond

The Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development saw the beginning of a new consensus on global social policy. "The concept of social development forged at Copenhagen was a highly inclusive and far-reaching attempt to capture fully the meaning of development"² Copenhagen agreements were founded on full employment, social integration and poverty reduction. Unfortunately the thinking of Copenhagen was distilled at the 2000 Millennium Summit into a minimalist cut-down version known as the Millennium Development Goals. These goals are outcome agendas separated from any theory of social policy equivalent to the neoliberal agenda that has dominated the global economic institutions.

Some of the ground was retrieved at the 2005 World Summit and there are rumours that more will be added to the international development agenda at the UN General Assembly this year. Regardless, we still lack a clear global social policy agenda.

Moving from global to regional development

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, key academics and ICSW see a real need and possibility to build a strong social policy force within regions. The mood is swinging to bring civil society into the regional discussions.

The swing towards regions is partly in response to the failure to reach consensus on global social policy. On one side you have the rich countries wielding power in the economic institutions. On the other hand the non-rich countries try to reach agreements on social policy in a variety of institutions that are ignored by the rich countries.

The growing inequity between the rich and poor countries is another reason why regional development is a sensible direction for social policy. Broadly the agendas are similar within a region. There is more scope for governments and civil society to confer and agree on common directions. It provides protection against some of the more disgraceful behaviour of the rich countries. For example, bilateral trade arrangements between rich countries and poor countries may have short term benefits for one nation but longer term it will cause damage. Regional agreements help to protect the poorer countries.

² Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2005) *The Social Summit Ten Years Later* United Nations New York

The neoliberalism agenda of decreased government ownership and reduced government intervention has led to the precedence of economic management within governments. Social welfare, housing and health ministries are despised in the neoliberal agenda because they spend money. In summary the neoliberal agenda is simply, making money - good, spending money - bad, private ownership - good, public services - bad. This attitude has left the social development ministers holding the least sought after positions in neoliberal governments. I do however detect a new spirit globally, regionally and nationally that recognises social development as being as important as economic development.

National and regional economics and social policy

While I am pessimistic about the influence of global civil society in global institutions I am optimistic about the influence of civil society at national and regional level. The first building block is a strengthened national civil society. Within ICSW we have talked about strengthening civil society for generations. Until recently the strengthening of national civil society has been given little support from donor countries.

The current reality of civil society intervention in national and regional policies

Thandika Mkandawire has outlined his perspectives on why we need to strengthen civil society. His thoughts are in a paper "*Disempowering New Democracies and the Persistence of Poverty*" Mkandawire 2006³

Mkandawire argues that private capital is strengthened in new democracies undergoing market-oriented reforms. Private capital "wields tremendous veto power over macroeconomic policies". The consequence is a weakening of the "state's capacity to regulate the economy and to mediate class and sectoral conflicts". (Mkandawire Page 18). The state and business have established new deliberative mechanisms but the same cannot be said of the poor due to "their lack of institutionalised channels that service their needs".

There is a contradiction in all this. Mkandawire refers to the "dramatic increase in funding for (service provider) NGO's". (Page 19). Mkandawire then comes to the conclusion "With their focus on service delivery at the micro level, NGO's are, as such, unlikely to constitute a major political force in combating poverty".

The major obstacle to mobilising "democratic institutions for poverty alleviation are the organisational weaknesses of the poor themselves".

In another section of the paper (Page 22), Mkandawire returns to the problems created by institutional deficits. "For all the talk about participation and consultation in PRSP's (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers), there are neither institutional arrangements for, nor political understanding of, the role

³ Mkandawire, Thandika 2006 "*Disempowering New Democracies and the Persistence of Poverty*"

of democratic institutions". Mkandawire suggests "there has been a systematic attempt to circumvent elected bodies in the consultative process of drawing up PRSPs". So much has been said about empowering the poor at the micro-level but at the same time the poor have been disempowered at the macro level.

Regional Social Policy agendas

There have been moves within regional intergovernmental bodies to establish social agendas. ASEAN has a Draft Social Charter, the European Union has a Social Agenda, MERCOSUR has established an Economic and Social Consultative Forum and ECOWAS has a Social and Economic Council.

I take possible areas of regional social policy from the UN DESA paper quoted previously⁴

- Employment and decent work
- Health
- Regulation of services, water, electricity and other utilities
- Social protection
- Higher education and research
- Housing
- International Migration
- Disaster prevention, management and mitigation
- Conflict prevention
- Human rights and empowerment of social groups
- Cross border crime

Lessons from other regions.

The initial focus of regional intergovernmental bodies is on trade and economic issues. They focus on free trade, privatisation of public goods and investment by foreign companies. The attendance at regional intergovernmental meetings tends to be from officials and ministers with macro economic responsibilities.

Social dimension of development is seen as a residual issue. "The poor will benefit from economic growth". But there is the fallacy. The neoliberal reforms in Latin America over the last decades have occurred concurrently with:

- Rise in unemployment
- Increased poverty
- Destruction of the natural environment
- Small farmers over powered by farming corporations
- Reduced access to public goods
- Diminution of social rights

⁴ Deacon B, Ortiz I, Zelenev S (2007) Op cit

Issues concerning civil society are brought in much later and with reluctance by regional groupings of governments. This is an extension of my earlier argument that social welfare issues are seen as negative as they absorb national financial assets.

One formula I have observed for successful civil society intervention is to take policy leadership rather than follow policies dictated by global institutions or governments. Reacting to policy often makes civil society appear negative. Creating policy provides an image of leadership.

ICSW has entered into partnership with groupings of NGOs in a number of regions. In Central and West Africa we have a Memorandum of Understanding to work with the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF). In East and Southern Africa, ICSW is working closely with the SADC Council of NGOs. We have published a briefing paper on Civil Society and the Southern African Development Community. We would like to explore more ways in which ICSW can work with ECOWAS and ECOSOCC.

In South East Asia we have published a Guide to ASEAN. ICSW in partnership with the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the ASEAN Secretariat coordinated the inaugural ASEAN government – NGO Forum.

The former states of the USSR now make up the bulk of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. ICSW provides considerable support to the Black Sea NGO Network (BSNGON). In the last year the BSNGON has prepared a Black Sea manual for NGOs; participated in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation; participated in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Working Group meeting on Good Governance and Institutional Renewal; created a website and many other activities.

These are just some of the activities that ICSW has either sponsored or undertaken. Our policy is not to duplicate or be in rivalry to existing structures but support local regional initiatives.

Civil society can work with the ministers of social development to enhance both social policy and budget allocations to implement policies. The ministers have a hard time in government budget discussions. They are always expected to cut their budgets. They do not have the vast influence and persuasion of their ministerial colleagues who have responsibility for such areas as anti terrorism or defence

Civil society influence in regions

Given there are many areas of mutual interest within a region, how can civil society best meet the challenges?

- Develop national councils that are strong in policy and have a broad based membership of organisations involved in social welfare and development.
- Establish a policy base at national and regional level on issues such as privatisation of public goods including water, electricity, hospitals, roads etc. This is important. I refer to my earlier comments where I suggested the economic agencies have clear policies. Social activists need to be as clear.
- Seek to have social policies integrated into national government and political party policies.
- Establish links with academics and educational institutions that can help with building knowledge of social policy.
- Within a region have mechanisms to share knowledge of regional agendas, and responses to regional agendas
- Learn from colleagues in other countries and other regions on best practice
- Establish agreements to participate in government sponsored activities
- Recognise that civil society leaders tend to be in positions much longer than ministers and governments and thus have a stronger ability to plan longer term.

Possibilities for Cooperation

ICSW supports and applauds the work of the ECOWAS Social Commission and its affiliated Civil Society Organisations. ICSW is working to increase the influence of civil society in social development through conducting training workshops for our national council members. In East and Southern Africa while we are meeting here ICSW is conducting a three day training programme. Themes include strengthening national councils, creating social policy and influencing national budgets. Creating stronger national umbrella organisations is one area in which ICSW and the ECOWAS Social Commission and ECOSOCC can work together. Strengthening national councils will benefit the work of the ECOWAS Council of NGOs.

Another aspect of cooperation is using ICSW's access to global forums. In Nairobi at the time of the World Social Forum, UNESCO asked ICSW to nominate civil society participants to attend a meeting of social development ministers and officials. We were pleased that we enabled the participation of a number of African civil society leaders including the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) and Chair of the SADC CNGOs.

In **Defining Social Development within the Context and Challenges of globalisation**, these are just some areas in which ICSW can forge a creative and useful partnership with ECOWAS.

ICSW looks forward to working with ECOWAS and the Social Commission to build the influence of civil society in West Africa as we “Evolve a Sustainable Social Dimension for ECOWAS Regional Integration Programme”.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your time and attention.

ⁱ “Neoliberalism in its international usage refers to a political-economic philosophy that rejects government intervention in the market. The philosophy specifically emphasizes free-market principles and the opening of foreign markets by political means. Neoliberals argue that markets free of government influence are essential for sustaining economic prosperity” **Beeson, M. and Islam, I. (2005) ‘Neoliberalism and East Asia: Resisting the Washington Consensus’.** *Journal of Development Studies* 41(2): 197-219.

“Neoliberalism is ... a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. ... State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit” **Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.** New York: Oxford University Press.