

Yassine Fall :

I will not repeat Charles. Thanks for inviting us for this meeting. I agree with all that Charles has said and will not repeat it. I had planned to display some power points, but that does not seem possible today. To go back to the introduction it is not enough to do an analysis of the past 40 years because we always have to go back to the fact that we are talking of 40 years of Africa being independent and we cannot forget that this period refers to a changed situation of geo-political decision making that we should be very mindful about in putting together our analysis.. We tend to forget that it was the result of the changing geo-political situation – when I talk to children and uneducated people who do understand what has happened to Africa and ask them why they think we are where we as African are – the poverty, lack of education and health facilities, poor governance and so on, people say: but why? What happened? And sometimes if you do not put this into the larger context and do not put it into the geo-political context and go back to colonialism and neo-colonialism, then you find yourself unable to understand the situation. So we need to go beyond these 40 years.

What do we have at stake – the agenda of globalization, and how the different frameworks - the framework of the HIPC, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), EPAs, NEPAD - all tend to support the WTO-agenda. All the objectives of HIPC are about trade-liberalization, market privatization and stabilization, about less state intervention. You look at EPAs which aim at bringing all the agreements that have been blocked at the WTO into the African /European ACP agreement, so as to push countries on a bilateral level, to twist their arms in order for them to come down and support the trade agreements that have been blocked at the WTO. And if you look at AGOA which is the US trade bill for Africa, - it is to serve the interests of the US corporations and the workers of that country. There is nothing, nothing at all you can see that can bring benefit to the interests of African people or workers. So you see again that hegemony. There is here a partnership between the international financial institutions, between the HIPC-initiative, between the OECD countries which table these agreements and discuss them – all the powerful together against one. Countries negotiate alone against these big powers and I think that we need to address and need to pose. There must be an equal power relation to question these big institutions, governments and these networks operating against one African country.

I also go back to the cost-benefit analysis to see who benefits and who loses. We tend to hear that the African end does benefit. Sometimes you tend to think that at last there is an agreement. But if you go deep inside you find that the laws are protectionist, still excluding profitable exports. When you look at the agricultural tariffs: they go beyond hundred percent in the US and Canada, and beyond 150% for the EU. So we see that we need to address power relations. African countries are asked to do whatever so as to create a trade environment, to create a climate that will be favourable to foreign investors and change labour laws. Yet in the US and in countries of Western Europe they do what is in their own interest.

Again the issue - do what I say but don't do what I do -, and it is just appalling to see what is happening in Africa today. I was in Africa recently and we tend to forget the despair that people are in. At a hospital in Kenya that I visited they had no water. Only very recently they managed to get running water, only last month. People just cannot afford to pay for the medical care they get. I found a child of 9 years who was held as hostage in the hospital even after her cure was over, because the parents could not pay the bills. This is very telling in terms of what cost recovery means – the whole hypocrisy of what we mean when we talk of education for all or education for girls. And we see all the inter-linkages of not being able to pay health fees, and children not being able to go to school. And I think we need go back to the community and really see how we can at the community level link up to do our advocacy at the global level.

This takes me to the issue of women and the feminization of poverty. I think when we talk about the feminization of poverty. This is a big dilemma. Because we are told that we should bring in the issues of global power relations when talking of poverty, but we should not bring in the issue of gender analysis when we talk of Africa. According to me inequalities between men and women exist everywhere, but the inequalities have been exacerbated because of the inequalities in power relations and because of the dominance at all levels in Africa and other poor countries. But we know that all development policies affect women differently.

All the policies whether the SAPs or the HPIC initiative or the PRSPs which have used the promise of debt cancellation to bring in new recycled SAPs and stabilizations policies but that has aggravated the poverty of the people because we have seen privatization which has been tabled as public/private partnerships. These partnerships have led to more poverty especially among women. We see an increase in violence against on the rise and we have seen in many African countries women have less access to education and there are countries where women pay more taxes than men because men are considered head of household. And when the IMF/WB say to the government that they should not spend more, - governments tend to make women pay more taxes. We see that women suffer a high incidence of AIDS than men. At the beginning there were very few women infected compared to men. Today 60% of women and girls are affected by this disease and we see that inequalities within the home and in gender relations within society in general, aggravate when economic policies and reforms that are market oriented are implemented. We also see that macro-economic policies do affect women differently – just as the availability of public services affect women differently than men. Take the issue of water – I was in Ghana recently with a fact-finding mission – many of the women in the communities we spoke to said how privatization of water and lack of availability of water make them take out girls from school since fetching of water becomes a task by itself and girl children are often taken out of school to be sent off to fetch water for the household every day. The load of poverty on women only gets aggravated in this way within the home. You go to any hospitals in Africa any hospital in any city it is women who are taking care of people there. So I think we should go a little beyond when we look at the community and the relations between people and see how their way of managing poverty and finding ways to cope is shouldered by women.

I want to go back to the start to say that I really support that we start organizing in our countries to change the situation. We need to act at different levels. I feel that our actions at the national levels are still very limited. It is only within our countries that we can bring about change. We need in our efforts to understand the situation to go beyond to see how communities deal with poverty among the different populations.

It is also important that we start organizing at all levels:

1) to address our governments in all our countries and get them to change their policies. Build large movements like ISODEC (?) in Ghana where this to fight water privatization for instance was reversed simply because it was resisted within the country supported by international advocacy campaign where the government was exposed for its wrong doing and deals made with private companies. This is very important.

2) Political space and outreach and engagement with policy makers need to take place into regional economic institutions. They are often forgotten – in terms of ECOWAS, of the African Development Banks or we need to engage with those because they are representative of the IMF and the World Bank or OECD at the regional and national levels in Africa.

3) Alliances with the North are very important. The question is: how can European NGOs influence the role European countries within the IMF. I feel that role is very marginal because the power relations between the US and European is still questionable and there is a lot of room for action. And there you activism in this sphere is very critical.

4) In Africa we have been successful in many cases, in engaging with our own governments. The success at Cancun was due to a mixed delegation of governmental representatives and NGOs of Africans. We need to see that there a lots of initiatives being undertaken in Africa and we need to learn from them as to what works and promote it.

Thank you.