

SHAME!

Many of the world's poorest countries have made extraordinary progress in their social development indicators in recent years, but the world is still far from the goals agreed by the international community. Progress in middle-income countries is insufficient and the richer nations have not met their commitment to contribute to less developed countries. Further, the global economy has not been made friendlier to people living in poverty, and their efforts to overcome misery have not found an enabling environment.

This is the picture that emerges from the country reports and global tables compiled by *Social Watch*, a coalition of civil society organisations from around the world. These organisations are monitoring the implementation by their governments of promises made at the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD in Copenhagen) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (WCW in Beijing) in 1995.

The preamble of the Charter of the United Nations established in 1945 that a basic aim of the international community is «to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom». Half a century later, the historic conferences of Copenhagen and Beijing spelled out explicit commitments to eradicate poverty in the world and achieve equality for all women.

By monitoring indicators globally and comparing deeds with promises in each country, *Social Watch* is contributing to the «urgent need» perceived by governments of «strengthened participation and involvement of civil society in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining the functioning and well-being of societies».¹

This *Social Watch* report, the fifth of a series started in 1996, is being published just as the General Assembly, the highest body of the United Nations, is preparing two special sessions to assess the implementation of the 1995 WSSD and WCW resolutions, and to decide on further initiatives to realise their commitments.

While the basic data are notoriously insufficient, the figures available are dramatic: very few countries have achieved the goals they set for 2000. These goals were not unrealistic; indeed, in

several cases they were extremely modest. At least 60 countries were showing substantial progress before the financial crisis of 1998. At that pace, those countries would meet most of the WSSD goals by 2000. Yet in another 70 countries, progress was too slow to reach the goals in time. Thirteen countries are at the same level or worse off today than they were in 1990, and for almost 40 countries, data are not enough for evaluation purposes.

The reports from the national *Social Watch* coalitions included here show different degrees of appreciation for their government's commitments to social development and gender equality objectives and how effective their policies are. But they all seem to agree that local efforts find obstacles in the present international environment, where macroeconomic decisions taken by non-accountable and non-transparent bodies, often without due participation of the affected governments themselves, have dramatic impacts on the people at the grassroots.

The following ten issues have been identified by non-governmental organisations from around the world as the key aspects to be addressed to make up the backlog on commitments in the first years of the twenty-first century.²

1. FACING THE FINANCIAL CRISIS WHILE PROTECTING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Since the WSSD, financial crisis has devastated entire regions of the planet, among them Southeast Asia, the economies in transition, and Latin America. The response to this crisis has been based largely on dogmatic economic recipes and the bail out of financial investors, despite near unanimous recognition that those policies have negative impacts on the vulnerable sectors of society, particularly women and children. Monitoring and control of international flows of capital, particularly of speculative capital, through agreed international mechanisms or national measures such as the proposed «Tobin tax» is essential.

¹ United Nations, World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, Denmark, March 6–12 1995, «Report of the WSSD», paragraph 70

² Adapted from «The Geneva Benchmark Issues, 10 NGO demands towards the 2000 Social Summit», document circulated that received hundreds of signatures in May 1999.

Governments should commit themselves in Geneva to participate in the «Financing for Development» event to be held in 2001 at the highest level. They should recommend that the agenda give top priority to reformulating international financial architecture, to democratic governance and accountability of the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, and to assessing the social impacts of investment liberalisation as proposed in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and different inter-regional agreements.

Existing initiatives for reducing the debt of certain developing countries must be speeded up, expanded and substantially improved to meet the WSSD commitment to alleviate the debt burden. Debt reduction should be delinked from structural adjustment conditionalities.

2. PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION OF THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF ADJUSTMENT POLICIES

In 1995, the heads of state and government committed themselves to «review the impact of structural adjustment programmes on social development» and «to enlist the support and co-operation of [...] the UN system, in particular the Bretton Woods institutions, in the design, social management and assessment of structural adjustment policies». Today, structural adjustment programmes are still more often than not «packages» with little economic and political viability. Their implementation involves dramatic consequences. In many developing countries, administrative and fiscal reforms and the reform of the state have favoured corruption and generalised lack of control; they have also destroyed local productive capacity, increased unemployment and degraded the quality of public social services without the benefit of a more efficient state as counterpart.

Recently, the World Bank and the IMF announced changes in their policies aimed at prioritising poverty reduction and with an emphasis on «country ownership» of the programmes. Yet, the initial perspectives of civil society emanating from the joint evaluations by the Bank, the government and civil society in various countries within the SAPRI (Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative) framework, show that policies on the ground have not been modified so far. The social, political and institutional instability created in beleaguered economies struggling for survival is not conducive to advancing goals of sustainable development, respect for human rights and equality. The enabling environment essential to fulfil the promises of global UN conferences has come under severe attack from a range of forces. Globalisation and fiscal austerity policies have cut public spending and services without denting the debt burden of poor countries. Economic reform policies have led the state in rich and poor countries alike to withdraw from its role as primary provider of social services.

The Special Session should therefore renew its recommendation that countries carry out participatory evaluations on the social impact of adjustment—including United Nations agencies, governments and civil society in these exercises—with a view to reformulating economic reform strategies. It should be recommended that effective, gender-sensitive measures be implemented to protect the livelihoods and human rights of persons living in poverty, particularly women.

3. THE COMMITMENT TO ERADICATE POVERTY

The governments committed themselves at the WSSD to set target dates for the eradication of poverty. At present:

- very few countries have established national targets;
- information on poverty levels and current national plans or programmes is frequently outdated and insufficient, which makes evaluation of advances and setbacks very difficult;
- the absolute number of poor people has increased, and in many countries, including some with high economic growth, the relative number of poor people has also increased;
- the feminisation of poverty continues;
- for many developing countries, the lack of an «enabling economic environment» and recessive economic policies will result in an increase of poverty, even in those economies, as in Southeast Asia, that had previously succeeded in reducing the number of poor people.

The Special Session should recognise that poverty is in itself a violation of the social, economic and cultural human rights of the affected populations, and that people living in poverty are more prone to be victims of violations of their civil and political rights. Poverty is the result of a complex interaction of domestic and international causes, and its persistence in a world that has the resources to provide for the basic needs of all, is a threat to international peace and security. The United Nations General Assembly should therefore establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to prepare a Convention to Eradicate Poverty.

The Special Session should urge each country to define specific goals to reduce poverty to at least one-half the values of 1993 by the year 2015, according to national standards of poverty, with a reduction of no less than one-third by 2010. Each country (including developed ones) should carry out annual national reports on poverty, current plans and evaluation of goals achieved, with participation of civil society.

4. GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY

The Copenhagen Commitments, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action stress the necessity of promoting and achieving equality and equity between men and women, and protecting and promoting women's human rights. So far, over 100 countries have informed the United Nations Secretariat about their national action plans, but advances are still slow and erratic. Many studies have detected a growing «feminisation of poverty», particularly in developing countries. Structural adjustment and economic globalisation do not affect men and women equally and, in many cases, have intrinsic discriminatory effects on women. The shift in decision-making on credit allocation from conventional banking mechanisms to stock exchanges results in big corporations having easier and cheaper access to credit, and discriminates against small and medium enterprises and family businesses where women tend to have more decision power.

Unemployment affects women more than men, not only by reducing employment opportunities, but also because of increased

domestic violence related at least partly to high male unemployment rates. Labour market and other forms of economic, social and cultural discrimination against women and girls continue. The growing burden of poverty on women and girls also places increasing pressure on them to earn incomes in dangerous occupations where they are vulnerable to trafficking, violence and abuse of human rights. Further, women and girls bear most of the burden of reduced social expenditures, which increase gender inequalities in access to services and require women to compensate with additional unpaid work in caring for the vulnerable.

The Special Session should call on governments and United Nations agencies to further advance studies aimed at recognising the unpaid work of women in the national accounts and to include the gender dimension in the evaluation of the social impact of structural adjustment. At the same time, the Special Session should recommend to international bodies that they adopt and strengthen implementation of a gender policy in their programmes and their institutional management. Targets should be established to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education no later than 2010.

5. EQUITY AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO BASIC HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION

The WSSD committed governments to achieving universal and equitable access to education and health. Notwithstanding, universalisation of basic education is still far from being attained in most African and other least developed countries, some of which are sliding backwards. Adult illiteracy continues to be a problem in most developing countries. The goal of extending access to health care and improving the quality of health services is not being met: child mortality has grown in some Eastern European countries, as well as in the Balkans, Latin America and Africa, and the goal of universalisation of access to reproductive health services is far from being fulfilled in most developing countries.

Through the nineties, governments implemented reforms designed by the World Bank and donor agencies aimed at improving the cost-effectiveness of public health systems. Health sector reforms have introduced market principles of efficiency and viability in this vital social sector and, in effect, undermined the human rights and social justice provisions envisioned at UN conferences, especially at Cairo. Market reforms imposed on top of economic crisis have dealt public health services a blow in countries undergoing difficult economic transition. Cost recovery measures such as user fees and other privatisation trends in public health systems have sharply reduced access to health services by the poor, women in particular.

The Special Session should urge governments to ensure that selective use of user fees, social marketing, cost-sharing and other forms of cost recovery do not impede access to services and are accompanied by adequate social safety net measures. It should also call for an increase in official development assistance for basic health care and education and emerging and continued health challenges, including malaria and other diseases identified by the WHO as having major impact on health, including those with the highest morbidity and mortality rates; provide prompt and necessary resources to deal with the severe impact of the HIV/

AIDS pandemic on vulnerable populations, women and young people in particular.

The Special Session should initiate efforts toward a Global Action Plan for Education, consistent with the resolutions of the 1990 Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, which targeted 2015 for achieving universal access to primary education in all countries. Education programmes should promote local cultures and languages, with particular care to respect and protect those of indigenous peoples.

Goals should also be set to:

- reduce infant and under-5 mortality by two-thirds of 1990 values by 2015 (and by no less than one-third by 2010);
- reduce by three-quarters the 1990 maternal mortality rates by 2015 (and by no less than one-half by 2010);
- universalise access to health, safe water and sanitation by 2015.

6. PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA AND LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

The WSSD committed countries to accelerating the economic, social and human development of Africa and the least developed countries. Nevertheless, most African and other relatively least developed countries have made little progress, and many are worse off now than in 1995.

The world's poorest countries owe an estimated USD371 billion in external debt, and are also faced with acute levels of human and environmental distress. Policy reforms that curtail public expenditure have deepened poverty and inequity in developing countries.

These countries should be considered exceptions in debates about finances and trade, and unilateral privileges and preferential treatment must be granted to them. Without energetic and efficient action to cancel or reduce these countries' debts by creditor countries and the multilateral financial institutions, African and other least developed countries will be condemned to stagnation and «social recession».

7. INCREASE OF RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT

At the WSSD, governments committed to augmenting resources for social development by increasing development aid to 0.7% of GNP, by increasing aid for basic social services (BSS), and by making support for BSS a greater percentage of total public expenditure. Yet, official Development Assistance (ODA) is today at its lowest level historically, in both absolute and relative terms, and those who are most delinquent in fulfilling their commitments are the world's richest countries (members of G7). This is particularly frustrating, since the OECD countries publicly committed themselves to the WSSD programme of action in their «Shaping the 21st Century» document, issued in May 1996.

8. FULL EMPLOYMENT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

The WSSD set the aim of full employment as a basic priority for policy-making. Yet, job creation has been insufficient. In many developing countries the dismantling of the State and the priority

given to economic sectors that are not labour intensive have resulted in a growing loss of jobs, with no alternative mechanisms for income creation. In countries where employment is the major source of «social protection», loss of jobs has wider consequences than just the economic ones: it generates «pockets» of social disintegration that are fast to appear and difficult to eliminate. The recessive scenario that most developing countries now face in the wake of financial crisis is a scenario of growing unemployment. Given this diagnosis, it seems clear that unless sustained political emphasis is placed on employment as a priority aim of social policy, it will not be possible to stop the increase in unemployment in the short term. The goals of creating dignified jobs and combating unemployment must be agreed upon, they must include well-defined deadlines and actions, and macro-economic policies must be modified to accommodate these goals.

9. TARGETS AND REVIEWS

The establishment of precise goals with set deadlines was one of the most positive traits of the Copenhagen Summit. It made possible the generation of political will and monitoring mechanisms that are essential to the fulfilment of commitments. Since many of the internationally agreed goals had the year 2000 as their horizon, the Special Session must agree upon goals for all countries—not just developing ones—with deadlines not later than 2015 and with intermediate deadlines (2005 and 2010) so that progress can be assessed. It is also important to acknowledge that the availability of specific (including gender specific) social development indicators is inadequate. There is also a major lack of data disaggregated along ethnic lines, which makes it impossible, for example, to properly assess the magnitude of damage caused by structural adjustment on indigenous peoples. The Special Session should recommend measures to guarantee the gathering and publication of such indicators and to stimulate national reporting on progress toward achieving them. The Special Session should encourage governments to clearly identify the institutional mechanisms to review, with the participation of civil society, the implementation of the ten commitments.

10. TRADE AND INVESTMENTS: THE INTERNATIONAL ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The Special Session, recognising that international trade and investments are key components of an enabling economic environment for social development, must verify that the WTO has not complied with the request made by heads of state and governments in Copenhagen to carry out a survey of the social impacts of the Uruguay Round. In the face of this omission, the survey should be entrusted to UNCTAD.

Keeping in mind the role of relevant UN bodies such as ILO, WHO, UNICEF, UNIFEM and the Commission on Human Rights in

promoting human rights and the specific rights of workers, women and children, setting standards and improving enforcement mechanisms, the Special Session should strengthen their work and discourage trends to empower trade and financial organisations with the capacity to impose further conditionalities on developing countries.

To ensure that international direct investments have a positive social impact, countries should strengthen their capacity to require specific social performance targets from foreign investors, as well as to define and implement policies aimed at establishing joint ventures, promoting income distribution in favour of underprivileged areas or social groups and protecting small business from the unfair competition of big foreign corporations.

A NEW SOCIAL SUMMIT IN 2005

The non governmental organisations are very much aware that the paucity of results shown by the assessments (their own, as well as those by the international organisations) can lead to a certain scepticism among the public about the usefulness of summits and international conferences. Yet, NGOs do not fail to recognise that the glass is half-full and as well as half empty. Even if not fully implemented, the written word of the Copenhagen and Beijing commitments is of enormous moral force and, in a democratic context, having set targets leads to fruitful debate and renewed political will to implement them. Societies cannot wait until 2015 for a new assessment of how close (or far) we are from the goals set. A new Social Summit has to be convened in 2005 to recharge the energies required at top decision-making levels to undertake a task comparable to the eradication of slavery in the XIX century.

It was not mere rhetoric when heads of state announced in 1995: *«We will give the highest priority in national, regional and international policies and actions to the promotion of social progress, justice and the betterment of the human condition, based on full participation by all.»* Social Watch does not believe that all decision-makers are cynics. We hope that a goodly number of them are embarrassed enough by these findings to dare to recognise the shortcomings and take urgent action.

Shame should not be distributed evenly. Those with greater power and wealth should be particularly embarrassed by the fact that the greatest progress has been achieved in some of the world's poorest nations. Even if the achievements of these poor nations have fallen short of targets, the efforts of their people and the commitment of their leaders deserve more support and recognition than has been given. The time to start redressing this scandal is now. For one billion women and men, tomorrow will be too late.

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