

SARPN comments on the G8 Communiqué

Speech delivered by Sue Mbaya, Director of SARPN
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As we all know many of the countries in Africa, continue to perform poorly in the area of poverty reduction. Amongst the worst affected and unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger are those in Southern Africa. The factors underlying the high prevalence of poverty on our continent and more specifically in our region are well known. Over the years we have seen progressively more concerted effort within African countries to address these causes. However increasingly acknowledged is the fact that the continent of Africa is not an economic island and that the poverty status of Africa's people is neither exclusively caused by nor does it exclusively affect Africans. Associated with this growing observation has been the acknowledgement that ending poverty in Africa is as much a humanitarian issue as much as it is an issue of justice.

In the light of these growing views the role of the international community in the development of Africa and the reduction of her poverty has increasingly taken centre stage, the consensus amongst development actors in Africa is that the problem of poverty in Africa is exacerbated by certain element of Africa's relationship with the international community. These elements include the high levels of debt; low levels of development assistance to Africa; high levels of export subsidies that are harmful to Africa and a global trade environment that is skewed against Africans.

Hence, on the eve of the recent G8 Summit in Gleneagles African voices both civil society and government called upon the international community to fulfil the commitment that it had previously made in support of development and poverty reduction in Africa. As the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan noted at the recent Assembly of the African Union in Sirte, just the fulfilment of existing promises to Africa by her development partners would be sufficient in taking Africa significantly closer to attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

It is therefore within the light of this backdrop that we evaluate the outcomes of the recent G8 summit. Let me start by re-iterating the various acknowledgements that have been made by civil society actors of the commitment express by the G8 leaders to increase their focus on Africa.

We are encouraged by the commitment expressed in relations to the fight against what is perhaps the worst development challenge that our region faces, that is, HIV/ Aids, although this needs to be clarified. Similarly we welcome the commitment expressed to increased support and investment in the areas of Health and Education.

We are also encouraged and welcome the indications by the G8 to strengthen its support to the African Union, its organs and its programmes, including NEPAD and the Pan- African Parliament.

As indicated by our partners in statements issued to date, we welcome the commitments made by the various G8 leaders in respect of increased aid to Africa. However as has been repeatedly acknowledged increased aid alone will not end poverty on Africa.

Africa is urgently in need of economic growth. Growth raises income and as average incomes grow extreme poverty can be expected to decline. We are therefore concerned that the communiqué of the G8 Summit appear to have missed some important opportunities of contributing to economic growth of African communities.

The area of agriculture is a case in point over the last few years we have received the commitment by African leaders to invest ten percent of their national budget to agriculture. This has been in acknowledgement of the centrality of agriculture and agricultural growth to the development of our economies. While acknowledging the importance of the agricultural sector the G8 Communiqué has not in our opinion given a sufficiently complimentary response to the commitment by African leaders.

We propose that African governments and agencies work closely with their international partners to clarify concrete commitment in the modality of their implementation. Related to this point, the concern has been repeatedly voiced that insignificant movement has been made with respect to reforming the global trade order. The continued poor access to global markets, agricultural subsidies that are harmful to agricultural economies and the crowding out of African producers and their product are likely to continue inhibiting the growth of our African agricultural sectors of African countries. Our concerns are further fuelled by the fact that no specific commitments were put on the table with respect to the AU/NEPAD Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) - the newly agreed framework for agricultural development.

FOOD SECURITY is one of the key contributors to poverty and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in our region. Over the last few days the results of the national crop assessment exercises have indicated that yet again Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho will experience food shortages. This means that humanitarian food assistance will yet again be required. It is in light of these developments that we are disappointed with the aid packet announced.

HUMAN SECURITY VS CONVENTIONAL STATE SECURITY

In the area of health, southern African civil society recently called on certain developed countries such as some of the member of the G8 to observe the *do-no-harm* principle. This is explicit in the active recruitment of nurses and doctors to these countries adding to the growing brain drain problem in the region. In this respect, recruitment alone to which the G8 has committed itself is not enough, there is a need to stem the tide.

CONCLUSION

The G8 Communiqué contains many encouraging statements which unfortunately are not matched by concrete proposals. Hence, it is our view that the outcomes of the G8 summit do not appear to move us closer to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, of halving the proportions of those living in poverty by the year 2015. Civil society therefore has to continue pushing for concrete commitments that are characterised by feasible timelines. Of course there is a role for Africans citizens and governments. High on this agenda should be removing social inequality and political exclusion in this formidable fight against poverty.