



African Flame

Another World is Possible

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Number 3

African Social Forum, Lusaka (ZAMBIA)

Still a hot potato: NEPAD and the AU

By Console Tleane

TAKING forward some of the major resolutions taken at various civil society meetings, including the demonstrations at the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), participants at yesterday's session on Nepad and the African Union expressed serious misgivings over the much-loved (by Western capital and rulers) New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Addressing the session Odura Ongwen of Kenya argued that Nepad is based on flawed and failed political and economic frameworks. One of the fundamental objects of Nepad is to encourage and attract Foreign Direct Investment into Africa. But for Ongwen it is important to still expose the real nature of FDIs.

"To attract FDI you must oppress workers, roll back their benefits, agree to the destruction of the environment, and introduce measures that are known to be detrimental to people," said Ongwen who also elaborated on flawed interpretations of basic economics that are contained in the Nepad document.

Responding to one of the often-



Panelists for the NEPAD session (Left to Right) Boubacar Diop, Thomas DEVE, Odour Ongwen and Moussa Dembele

advanced debate by those who support Nepad (that it is an African solution to Africa's problems) Dembela Moussa from Senegal postulated two basic assumptions that he said informed his (and surely many other people's) viewpoint and attitude towards the programme. He said that the West

will never develop Africa. All that Western powers are interested in is to exploit Africa.

The second assumption is that most African leaders do not care about their citizens. It is therefore important to avoid adopting a programme simply because it is said to have been developed by

African leaders.

"We should not just follow leaders because they are elected. We should carefully study the policies that they develop and espouse," said Moussa, who earlier had the session in stitches when he announced that he was

To page 3

Youth at ASF

By Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng

KARIN Nkhumbula and Wamafe Wamafe are two of the hundreds of participants at the third African Social Forum currently going on in Lusaka. In a role reversal, they asked to interview me and persisted even when I explained that as a journalist, I felt it was my duty to interview them. In the face of such persistence, I gave in and sat across from my interlocutors.

After initial introductions, they fired their first question: "In your country are young people allowed to express themselves on social, economic and political issues"? I must confess that the question threw me for a bit but I recovered to give a plausible answer while all the time thinking where their line of questioning was leading.

My admiration for the interviewees grew rapidly during our 20-minute encounter for Karin and Wamafe are two 17 year olds who are among scores of

To page 3

Another Zimbabwe is Possible: But how?

By Lanre Arogundade

FRESH testimonies on Zimbabwe at the on-going African Social Forum have shown greater repression in the country. But speakers at Saturday's Zimbabwe Social Forum expressed considerable optimism that another Zimbabwe is possible.

The clapping, dancing and rendition of liberation songs that punctuated the debates did not over-shadow the bigger question of how another Zimbabwe can be made possible.

Chairing the session, Thomas Deve noted the complexity of the Zimbabwean situation since President Robert Mugabe presents himself to outsiders as anti-imperialist while oppressing

his people at home. The discussion was therefore important to clarify delegates but more importantly formulate a way forward.

Taking the lead, Regis Mtutu, Chairperson of the country's social forum said with three million Zimbabweans having left the country for security reasons and also because of harsh economic conditions reasons, the crisis is now global. It also threatens regional peace and solidarity. He said the main challenge is to ensure collective fight for the right to jobs and land, the right to vote freely, and the right to social justice and democracy.

Rita Nyamupinga described the multiple problems faced by women including unemployment, low wages, HIV/AIDS and many

others. She emphasized that another Zimbabwe would be possible only when women exploitation is stopped.

But Philani Zamchiya of Zimbabwe National Students Union said the youths are the hardest hit by poverty and demanded the expansion of the democratic space to accommodate the views of the youths, adding that youths never opposed land re-distribution but partisan distribution of land to those in power.

Speaking for organized workers, Techa Masamba from the Congress of Zimbabwean Trade Unions said to avoid going back to enslavement there may be a need for oppressed working peoples to form a new political

To page 3

ASF participants in for a treat tonight

By Glory Mushingie

PARTICIPANTS at the on-going 3rd edition of the African Social Forum (ASF) are this evening scheduled for a rare entertainment treat, as music performances take over the venue in a concert that will leave spectators yearning for more.

This is one event that will bring together displays from some of Zambia's best artists around.

The event is also expected to see other countries artists present their flare.

It will be time for people from different components of civil society to put their pens and papers down for a moment and be driven into a short musical journey of magnificent oblivion from the

ills of society that have led the mass movements to convene here in Lusaka at a time such as this.

Those of us that witnessed the performances on the first day would agree that this would be a night to remember every time the name 'Africa Social Forum' is mentioned.

Some of the billed performers include Danny, alias 'Danny Masiku Onse' and the ever vibrant continental performing duo, The 'Sakala Brothers', known for their consistency in reflecting the African way of doing things in as far as music is concerned as well as their Zambian cultural way of dancing accompanied by a foot stamping dance which they have come to call 'The Rah!'.
Also lined up to display their acts

To page 3

Come and watch our fantastic performance of our Zambia Musician for the Africa Social Forum Concert

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- AMAYENGE
- DANNY

Free Entry

DATE: Monday 13th December 2004
VENUE: Mulungushi International Conference centre
TIME: 18:00 hours Till late

Between a rock and a hard place: Africa's debt cancellation dilemma

By Lanre Arogundade

DOES Africa have a choice between US or UK's positions on debt cancellation? This was the big question at the African Forum yesterday as discussions on the African debt crisis got underway yet again.

At issue was whether to support the position being canvassed by the United States for a 100 percent debt cancellation for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) to be funded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) even if it will affect their borrowing capacity.

Or should Africa adopt the United Kingdom's push for cancellation that will otherwise be funded so as not to undermine future borrowing ability of the countries. The UK also includes countries like Nigeria that is not ranked among the HIPCs and Haiti among likely beneficiaries.

Africa's debt is estimated to stand at \$540billion with debt expenditure accounting for 70

percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

"We need a clear direction from the global south – Africa in particular," said Soren Ambrose of the US-based 50 Years Is Enough Network. He posed the question: "What is the priority, debt cancellation or aid flow?"

He explains that the exact outlines of the UK position has not been made public but what it (the UK) essentially seeks is to finance the debt relief process using money from British tax payers mainly to avoid the World Bank from losing resources.

According to Marie Clarke Brill, Director: Department of Public Education and Mobilization of Africa Action, one possible compromise solution which civil society has been talking about is that IMF's gold could be revalued or sold to pay for both IMF and World Bank debt. Though IMF says this is technically impossible, analysts have said this is possible, citing limited precedents in the past.

But sharper reactions to the poser were quick in coming though a consensus on the issue may have to wait till after Monday's discussions on solutions and alternatives to the debt crisis.

Mary Sitaly of the Zambian Civil Servants Union dismisses the two suggestions as tricks by the super powers that may not fundamentally tackle the problem. "We have to refuse and come up with our (African) position," she says.

John Moru from Action Aid Nigeria expresses similar sentiments. For him, both could combine to become one dangerous proposal as the question of debt cancellation as a short-term strategy is not being linked with the long-term issue of good governance, the lack of which contributed to the debt problem in the first place.

The key issue, he says, is that the African political elite must be compelled to take the path of using resources to develop social services as against borrowing for the same purpose.

Senegalese Dembe Moussa Dembele of the African Forum on Alternatives and Chair of the session has been an anti-debt campaigner for years. He says both the US and UK proposals need to

be subjected to close scrutiny with the help of Northern anti-debt campaigners because they are laden with conditionalities.

"First of all we need to really examine the implications of each of these proposals in terms of getting rid of debts for African countries, in terms of future financing for African countries, in terms of relationship between the African countries and multi-lateral institutions and developed countries," said Dembele.

He however thinks the UK proposal is weak on this side because it still wants to give power and influence to IMF and World Bank to dictate policies in Africa.

"But we want to get rid of IMF and World Bank influence in Africa. We know that most of the debt crisis and its implications came from structural adjustment policies. Even their lending is just promises and we know that those promises they fulfill them if you destroy your country – trade liberalization, commercialisation and privatisation etc. so we don't want to even have their money. If we had alternatives we would say thank you IMF, thank you World Bank, take your money and go back to Washington DC," added Dembele.

Beyond the debate on the two

positions, the Forum heard about progress that had been made in the past period on the debt campaign. Marie Clarke Brill believes the April 2004 60th unhappy birthday celebration for the IMF/World Bank that involved thousands of signatures had a positive impact on the debt cancellation movement.

Hassan Sumonu, Secretary-General of Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) also reported that the prevalent sentiment at the recent NEPAD multi-stake holders dialogue was that debt should be cancelled. Referring to the analogy of Algerian President who he quoted as saying, "we owe 10 dollars, we pay 26 dollars but they say we are still owing 9 dollars", he reiterates the argument that African countries have paid many times over what they owe and therefore it is morally justified to ask for unconditional cancellation of debts.

Jessica Beaumont and Imani Countess of American Friends Service Committee spoke about the progress in taking the debt campaign to the American communities populated by Africans and others affected by the debt problem but add that a lot of people still have to be helped to understand the debt issue.

No to World Bank-Civil Society relations

By Console Tleane

“THERE may come a time when the lion and the lamb will lie down together, but I am still betting on the lion.”

Henry Wheeler Shaw should have had the feelings of the participants at Saturday's session on *engagements between the World Bank and the civil society* in mind when he said the above words. Other people had adapted the above quotation to read: "The lion and the lamb may lie side by side, but the lamb shall forever be restless."

The latter reflected the mood in the session more accurately. The restlessness of the participants was evident from the beginning of the session. The session was supposed to consider developments that have already taken place between some civil society organisations, particularly those led by CIVICUS, whose director, Kumi Naidoo, introduced the topic.

Naidoo informed the meeting about a series of consultations that have taken place between the World Bank and civil society. These consultations will culminate in a meeting scheduled for April 2005.

Without a single dissenting voice, participants rejected any dealings with the Bank. The Bank's bad record on the continent and the tonnes of evidence that indict it for the continued poverty of the African people were cited as the main reasons why any engagement will not be meaningful.

The message was clear; there is no way that the ASF would entertain any dealings with the Bank. And those who would like to continue dealing with it will have to do so out of their own accord.



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HIV/AIDS: Women's rights still undermined

Diana Mulilo, Zambia

SOUTHERN African region has a total of 204 million which constitutes 2 percent of the world's population but which has the unfortunate distinction of carrying 70 per cent of the world's HIV/AIDS infections.

According to Wole Olaleye, Policy co-coordinator for Actionaid, people aged between 15 and 49 make up 46 percent of the region's population. The HIV/AIDS infection rates from the lowest in the Seychelles and Mauritius which stand at 4.9 percent through to countries like the DRC, Botswana and Swaziland which have averages of 40 percent. In certain localities prevalence rates may be high as 70 percent and the life expectancy varies from a high of 27.7 years in Seychelles to a low of 33.4 years in Zambia.

As the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to claim lives, more children will be orphaned, with half of SADC region (Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia) having an estimate rate of about 20 percent of children being orphans. Women are the hardest hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, imposing further burdens on them.

Olaleye adds that community-based responses are based on women who must invest more time in care and support, while grandmothers are also raising orphaned children left by parents who die from HIV/AIDS. The pandemic is turning young children into family heads, breadwinners, and caregivers.

While life-prolonging treatments have become available, only a small proportion of people in need of such treatment are accessing it. As the ranks of people living with HIV/AIDS continue to swell the ability of the region to stem the tide of impact will



Putting heads together to overcome HIV/AIDS pandemic

largely depend on the extent to which the rights of this ever-growing segment of the population are acknowledged and acted upon.

As Africa continues to experience the problem of Heavily Indebted Population Countries (HIPC) the economies are being affected, hence, the food security is becoming a major concern for the region. With this situation the HIV/AIDS epidemic is adding a greater urgency than ever before to find a workable solution. Women being the victims of the pandemic, most of them do not own or control the means to produce food. This is so because men, who are the decision makers even at a household level, largely own land.

The impacts of poverty and inequalities are incredibly disproportionate amongst the women folk and HIV/AIDS is not an exception. Yet very few programmes directly address the evidence from the statistics.

The biological and social vulnerability of women to infection varies with age. Women aged between 15-24 years are 2.5 times more likely to be infected than males of the same age.

Those directly affected by the pandemic are often left out of the many

national, regional and international conferences, seminars and workshops that are organized to consider the effects of the disease.

Southern African women's rights organisations and HIV activities meeting held recently in Johannesburg, South Africa, articulated why things are so bad for women. The document produced by that meeting read in part: "We tried to mainstream gender in a stream that was already rotten. In so doing, we left the women behind. We need to re-examine our work from a truly women's perspective and question whether what we are doing is resulting in gender equality."

HIV/AIDS and its impact on women is simply a symptom of the underlying, deeply entrenched, and historically known fact of discrimination against women, patriarchy, and unequal power relations. These are issues that the women's rights movement has campaigned around and scored a few successes. African governments and the international community have also belatedly acknowledged that violations of women's rights underlie the pandemic. But policy and legislative changes are still too slow in coming.

Correction from Edition 2

The story titled "The ASF receives support from India". The sentence should have read that "Murthy promised India's support for Africa's bid to host 2007 WSF."

Youth at Africa Social Forum

From page 1

teenagers and even younger children attending this Forum. They have impressive titles too.

Karin is the vice president of the Children's Rights Club of Zambia while Wamafe is the outgoing publicity director. The club is the brainchild of Mr. Emmanuel Sinkala, who as club coordinator has nurtured it since the Zambia Civic Education Association founded it two years ago.

One of the more prominent groups at the ASF 2004 is the youth movement. At the opening of the forum on Friday and after, the number of young people, some of whom are identified by their various T-shirts and logos. Their participation is not a fringe activity or a fluke; the Africa Social Forum Council, which was formed at the Cairo meeting of the ASF



Mobilising for youth visibility at forum

secretariat, recommended that the youth should be empowered to participate fully at the Lusaka Forum.

Furthermore, the Council suggested that the Africa youth movement needed to

organise itself and form a standard framework based on the World Social Forum Youth Camp. According to the document outlining the participation of the youth, "this is to achieve constructive youth inclusion in the progressive reflection of issues affecting their lives in the process of finding alternatives to the neoliberal world order that has gripped the twenty-first century".

This amounts to a ringing endorsement of the role the youth can and do play in the

concerns that drive the social movement as a whole. However, a Zambian youth leader agreed that this was a significant achievement for the African youth movement but stressed that this endorsement still fell short of their demand that one in every four of participant at this forum should belong to the youth group.

The youth groups had also urged the ASF Council to establish an African Youth Council but the ASF Council decided that this

had to be an initiative of the youth movement itself. To enable this process to start, the ASF Council agreed to the holding of a Youth Camp at Lusaka following the ASF. This is why the youth are at Lusaka in their numbers, taking their destiny in their own hands.

In terms of youth participation in Lusaka, southern Africa appears to have a stolen a march on the other regions of the continent. This is not only because the Forum is taking place in the region, but also because the youth of the region are better organized than those from the other regions. They participated in the Southern Africa Social Forum in November 2003.

At that regional forum, they had the opportunity to take part in the various themes that were discussed: labour, debt, trade, gender, education & culture, HIV/AIDS, health, agriculture & food security, information & communication technologies, governance & constitutionalism, land

& environment and youth. They even produced a structure that is led by a regional steering committee appointed at regional level to organise the regional Social Forum, and national committees that organise at national level. Following that meeting, there have been many others at which the youth have pressed their case on many fronts, including the establishment of a youth bulletin at subsequent ASFs.

While they continue to press their case for an enhanced qualitative and quantitative representation at the Forum, the Forum organizers must take steps to ensure that the same organizational zeal and enthusiasm that the southern African youth have demonstrated can be replicated in the other regions of the continent. This will ensure that at the next ASF, there will be youth representation from Cairo to the Cape and from Cape Verde to the Horn. As for my interviewer friends, my hope is that 20 years down the line, some 17 year olds will be giving them the same treatment.

Another Zimbabwe is Possible: But how?

From page 1

movement/party that can effectively challenge the ruling government.

Munyaradzi Gwisai of the International Socialist Organisation of Zimbabwe however said "the objective must be the abolition of private property" which is at the root of the exploitation of the majority working peoples by a few elite. "We are many, they are few. If we unite and use our collective power no force can defeat us," he said.

Lloyd Pswarayi, Coordinator of Media Alliance of Zimbabwe,

identified several barriers erected against the media through various legislations including Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Public Order and Security Act and Broadcasting Services Act. All of them combine to deny access to information, criminalise journalism practice and encourage a ban on newspapers and harassment of local and foreign journalists.

He called on the African Union to exert pressure on the Mugabe government to allow the media to operate freely.

ASF participants in for a treat tonight

From page 1

this evening will be such groups as The Kamoto and Zuba Nimoto dance groups, among other musicians and dancers.

The Amayenge Culture Ensemble, an almost-

prehistoric band that has stood the taste of time amidst so much transformation of music in the country and in Africa, and yet still remains seasoned both at home and abroad, is also expected to

add its spice to the concert. The band which has from time immemorial consistently managed to attract and hold on to fans with a firm grip with the spell of its pure Zambian music that cuts across many of the

72 dialects that exist in Zambia would probably be backing most of the performers this evening in addition to its own performance.

There is no cover charge.

Still a hot potato: Nepad and the AU

From page 1

so tired of talking about Nepad that he hoped this was the last time that he was asked to do so.

While there was general consensus that Nepad is framed within the neoliberal paradigm, and operates within the parameters of the World Bank and IMF, what seemed to divide participants was how to practically respond to the programme.

The majority of speakers felt that a total rejection was in order. A few participants, mainly youth, felt that it would be suicidal to completely reject Nepad and not take advantage of some

of the opportunities that it presents, like the Peer Review Mechanism.

Echoing the latter viewpoint Njeri Mwangi from Kenya said that African civil society leaders should take the opportunity to expose some of the practices of the Group of Eight (G8) countries.

"We have an opportunity to name and shame the G8. We should expose the neoliberal policies that they advance and show how they devastate the economies of Africa," said Mwangi.

With broad consensus reached about the fact that Nepad is a neoliberal project that adopts and promotes

the failed policies of the World Bank and IMF the discussion shifted to the question whether it is beneficial to engage with Nepad or to reject it.

Hassan Soumonu believed that there are some benefits in engagement. He argued that civil society organizations should try to influence the direction and content of the developments within Nepad and the African Union.

This view was however shot down by Ongwen who argued that "As long as Nepad is about the exploitation of the natural resources, the liberalization of our economies and financial systems and other

measures, your engagement will amount to nothing."

Considerations about whether to engage or not need to be informed by the simple fact that Nepad does not seek to change the fundamentals of the current world economy (neoliberalism) and the additional fact that economic relations between the West and Africa continue to be governed by frameworks that essentially deepen the hold of the Structural Adjustment Programmes. These include the EPAs, AGOA, debt repayment, and many other strategies.

Also, the disturbing figures with regards to trade between Africa and the West need to be taken into account. Currently, Africa's debt repayment amounts to US\$80 billion per year. Contrast this to Nepad's projection of a US\$64 billion needed to give a boost to Africa's development. About US\$140 billion in profits is extracted by the West out of Africa. In 2002, Africa lost about US\$300 million in cotton revenue to the USA alone because of the latter's subsidies to its 25 000 farmers.

Simple mathematics plus a reading of some of the

United Nation's reports on attempts to reduce poverty in Africa reveal that unless there is a fundamental change in the current economic framework then there is less likely to be an improvement in humanity's condition.

The presentations made during the session, and other resolutions of the African civil society movement, reinforce the view that Nepad is unlikely to make any dent on Africa's problems.

The choice for the ASF seem to be how best to improve the articulation against Nepad.

Zimbabwean's to fight

By Mutinta Himunyanga

ZIMBABWEAN'S have vowed to fight all problems and challenges their country is faced with in order to rebuild their nation.

During the African Social Forum (ASF), a sub-committee discussing the crisis of Zimbabwe resolved that they are committed to fight all forms of exploitation by the current government.

The delegates from Zimbabwe also noted that a better Zimbabwe is already in making.

"We are very positive and happy to say that a better Zimbabwe is already in making and this is a country where we will all be proud to say that we are citizens of Zimbabwe," said Thomas Deve a delegate from Zimbabwe representing Mwengo an NGO.

Deve noted that Zimbabwe is faced with a number of challenges and that currently the fuel shortage is bad with one spending about at least 48 hours on the queue before the can purchase the

commodity.

And a representative of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) Mlamuleli Sibanda bemoaned the migration of many Zimbabweans to different countries both within the continent and in Europe.

Sibanda added that about three (3) million Zimbabweans have left for Europe and that many are now living in the neighboring countries.

"A number of Zimbabwean's have fled to other countries in search peace and jobs to enable them provide for their families," said Sibanda.

He however expressed disappointment at the non-participation of other trade unions within the continent and in particular Zambia been the host nation.

Sibanda however challenged the trade unions and the labour movement that if the continent is to overcome all its problems, the trade union movement has a bigger role to play.

He added that fora's such as ASF are an opportunity to put forward the problems that different countries are faced with and the continent in general and see how best as a continent we can deal with the challenges.

Sibanda disclosed that in Zimbabwe, it is difficult to mobilise the civil society because for any meeting to take place, there is need to obtain a police permit which is difficult as the police mainly favour the ruling party.

He noted that Zimbabweans have resolved that they are going to fight all forms of exploitation and violation of human rights.

The government of Zimbabwe has just passed a draconian Act that aims at controlling the activities of non-governmental organizations.

The delegates from other countries have also committed themselves to help the Zimbabweans in fighting for a better Zimbabwe that would see the improvement of the livelihood of all its people.

Outside forces accused of fanning conflict in Africa

By Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng

EMERGING consensus at a meeting on peace and conflict in Africa has pointed accusing fingers at "external influences" as the main motor of conflict making in Africa. The meeting is one of several thematic meetings taking place at the 2004 African Social Forum in Lusaka, Zambia from December 10-14. In his contribution to the discussion, the veteran South African rights and anti-apartheid campaigner and writer, Dennis Brutus said that conflicts in Africa are mostly about Africa's resources, which are the main attraction for those who instigate conflict and those who intervene. He cited the situation where African countries are being asked by the G8 to strengthen their armies in order to better police G8 access to Africa's mineral wealth.

Earlier, John Stewart of Novasc in a panoramic sweep of conflicts in Africa had identified several courses that he thought needed close study and attention. Some of the sources which he identified were problems of power succession, access to and control of resources, conflicts over identities, ethnicities, etc and cross-border ethnic associations and allegiances. Others were religion and the linkage of state power to masculine forms of expressing power relations. Stewart explained that the peace pacts that had been established in some conflict countries, for example, Sierra Leone and DR Congo are so fragile that they need real measures to sustain them. He said that in countries such as Nigeria and Zimbabwe the "state is at war against the people", but he believed that the reinvigorated African Union is showing more seriousness than the OAU in addressing conflicts.

Fofana, the convener of the meeting said it was important to understand two major things about conflicts in Africa. Firstly that the conflicts belong to different categories, namely old conflicts, new(ish) conflicts, and crisis states conflicts. He cited Liberia and Western Sahara as old conflicts, Congo, Chad and Darfur as "new" and said states like Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Guinea Bissau were states in crisis. He said one characteristic of African conflicts was the presence of "American management and fights over spheres of influence. He cited examples from the Great lakes region and Cote d'Ivoire to support his assertion.

Abdulai Darimani of Third World Network - Africa expanded on Brutus' argument but specified it into a series of actions by citizens to arrest the exploitation of Africa's resources and its inevitable leading to conflict. He said in order to withstand the "lobbying" and influence of the international finance institutions, the major corporations and African governments' forced responses, citizens have to fight to strengthen their collective rights and power. He said this could challenge governments to resist the power and influence of the lobbyists and prevail on them enact good policies. Such citizens groups, he said, would also force state institutions to live up to their responsibilities.

MALAWI SCRUTINIZES 2ND DAY SESSIONS

Debt Cancellation, Globalization and Education Under microscope

THE second day has been the powerful day for Malawi as her delegation positioned strategically itself with a view to garner maximum benefit from all the break-away sessions, ranging from 'Debt and macro-economic policies, to the Agrarian question and the future of peasant agriculture. This befitted the broad-based specialization and expertise that has been drawn from various disciplines and areas of interest i.e. human rights, gender, consumer, youths, education and faith-based organisation.

A special highlight was the expression of sentiments on the richness of such forums as these with respect to sharing synergies, experiences and efforts considering the commonalities existing in the various African cum developing countries. This poses as a sole consolation to the numerous ills in our economies as we deliberate and share on best practices for overcoming them.

Speaking at the session on debt and micro-economic policies, Dalitso Kubalasa of Malawi Economic Justice Network said foreign debt cancellation is not the

only way to rectify the ill economic situation in most African countries. Malawi noted that governments should also find ways of managing internal debts as away of controlling its economic reforms.

The Malawi delegation also asked the Forum to critically look at issues that would help to improve access to and quality of basic education contribute towards achievements of Education for All (EFA) Goals. Bright Kampaundi of Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education asked the African governments to ensure that six EFA goals are achieved. He however bemoaned the delay by Malawian government to complete Malawi EFA plan, which is still its draft form.

Steve Kapoloma of Consumers Association of Malawi, in the session of gender and trade, asked the Africa Social Forum for to spearhead the fight against sale of public utilities that provide essential services to the citizens such as water, electricity, education, and health. He noted that commodifying basic services

removes the power of citizens to bargain in cases of economic injustices such as electricity power cuts and inadequate supply.

Malawi said the fight against WTO rules, globalization, privatization and trade liberalization policies that are imposed on African land can only be achieved if the grassroots are fully taken on board from planning to implementation levels.

Western nations threaten Africa's sovereignty

By Bright Chibvuri - Zimbabwe

AFRICA will never be a sovereign continent if its natural resources continue to fall in the hands of powerful nations and other international conglomerates, professor Samir Amin from Senegal has said.

Asserting people's sovereignty can only be guaranteed if people are given an opportunity to decide their political, economic social destiny without any external interference, he said.

Although imperialism and colonial has been 'abandoned', the politics of the present day have taken new dimensions, which tend to recolonise Africa and other poor nations world wide through globalisation and neo-liberalisation.

Under globalisation, economically weak nations struggle to compete with developed countries because they lack of resources and rapid technology transfer systems, and thus subjecting the people to perpetual poverty that ultimately undermine their sovereignty.

Despite standing United Nations resolutions, which gives

nations the powers to have full control over their natural resources, these undertakings have never been respected by powerful nations like America, which aspires to own almost all the world strategic resources.

A clear example is its invasion of Iraq on trumped up charges that the rich oil country had weapons of mass destruction.

Since the invasion, the sovereignty of the people of Iraq has been done a major blow. Thousands of people have died while several others have been wounded and the majority are now homeless because of the conflict perpetrated by a greedy super power with economic interest of another nation.

This being the case, Amin said social movements should start moving motions to have exploiters of natural resources, pay high levels of taxation.

Wars and political instability initiated by the world's rich nations for their personal gains has also been identified as one major problem which threaten the sovereignty of most African States and other small pockets of the world.

"Wars manufactured by these bully nations has had a major blow on the sovereignty of much of the

population of Africa," said one delegate from Tanzania.

There is also a call for African nations to draw the line between state and people's sovereignty because other African States are totally independent from external forces, but they oppress the people they govern.

A good example is Zimbabwe, which the authorities claim is a sovereign State when her people are living in political captivity.

Several laws in that country have passed to limit democratic space evidenced by the closing of independent press, state sponsored violence and most recently the passing of the notorious NGO Bill which aims to chase away all civic organizations focusing on human rights and civic issues.

Given the situation, the multi-million dollar question is; "How can a people's sovereignty be asserted when their freedoms are not guaranteed by their own governments?"

Sala Saducidi of the Sahiba Sisters Foundation of Tanzania said societies should start to build initiatives that promote their people's sovereignty from the grassroots by recognizing, for instance, gender inequalities.

