Civil Society Regional Outreach Workshops
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In July and August 1998, the civil-society network in Ghana organized a series of outreach workshops in all ten of the country's regional capitals. The workshops were held to provide information on SAPRI, to identify issues of concern to civil society to serve as a basis for discussion at the Opening National Forum and to select representatives from the regions to attend the Forum.

At each of the regional workshops, people from different backgrounds -- including farmers, entrepreneurs, civil servants, chiefs, district officials and representatives from trade unions, women's groups, NGOs and religious organizations -- took part in the discussions.   They addressed the impact of structural adjustment policies in six areas: health, education, agriculture and food security, gender, governance and the local economy at the micro level. Issue papers commissioned by the Civil Society Coordinating Council, CivisoC, as part of its preparation for the Opening National Forum, informed the discussions on these issues.

Some of the concerns raised during these discussions are listed below. The overall impression drawn from the regional outreach workshops was that while the particular adjustment policies may have had some positive effects, their impact had been to worsen the situation of the majority of ordinary citizens.

Health

Cash and carry systems have made the poorer sections of the population incapable of paying for their treatment and medicines. Thus, they prefer self-medication. A number of participants pointed out that hospitals in the poorer areas lack basic hospital equipment.

Education

User fees have reduced access to education, especially among low-income groups in both urban and rural areas. Again, as a result of the educational reforms, quality of education has fallen. This could be seen by the fact that many students lack numeracy and literacy skills even after completing JSS and SSS. The JSS system, in particular, is producing students with few practical skills.

Agriculture and Food Security

The main issues of concern raised were the removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs and credit facilities. Many small-scale farmers cannot afford the high costs of agricultural inputs. This has made many of them abandon farming for trading. On the other hand, farmers in export agriculture find it easier accessing credit than those who produce for domestic market. This has led many farmers to use more fertile land for the production of non-traditional export crops, such as cashew and pineapple, rather than for local staples.

Local Level / Micro Impacts

Employment was a central issue raised. A large-scale retrenchment of public-sector workers has resulted in high levels of unemployment. There has also been a decline in formal-sector employment, while informal-sector jobs, which are characterized by poor working conditions, have increased significantly under adjustment. Meanwhile, there has been very little employment creation, particularly among the youth.

Trade liberalization had led to the closure of many local industries as they cannot compete with cheaper imported goods now available on the market. As a result of high interest rates, local businesses cannot afford to borrow money to expand their businesses. Mining is one of the sectors that benefitted enormously from the SAPs, although many communities in the mining areas have experienced hardships because their main sources of livelihood had either been destroyed or polluted.

Governance

Policies were implemented with little or no involvement of the Ghanaian people. Mostly, these policies and programs were discussed between the government and the World Bank, with the Bank having a stronger position than the government.

Gender

Women have particularly suffered under SAPs, specifically through large-scale retrenchment in the public sector; the application of user fees in education and health care; the removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs and the subsequent rising costs of these inputs.