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Economic Commission for Africa

**DOMESTIC IMPEDIMENTS TO POPULAR PARTICIPATION
IN THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

by

Mazide Ndiaye
Director-General of RADI



**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION
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12-16 February 1990
Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania



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INTRODUCTION

The role of government, among other things, is to prevent one person or group of persons from becoming so powerful that they can impose themselves by force on the nation. And yet, as a general rule in Africa, government has almost invariably been hijacked by one person or committee given the name of "recovery", "redemption" or "salvation" with a view to reassuring the people.

Even within such committees, the balance of forces is unequal among members and power is in fact exercised by the one who is known to be the "strong man" of the regime. Such force, in Africa, is fortunately very rarely given genuine popular support.

Those leaders who are concerned about the opinion of the people and wish to base their popularity on policies designed to create conditions for meeting the legitimate aspirations of the people also happen to be very rare.

Popular support and mobilization which leave enough room for individual initiative meant to lead to genuine progress is almost never an initiative taken by African Governments.

When some leader becomes popular, his popularity is very quickly eroded by the authoritarianism which almost invariably occurs because the popular leader believes he may do anything and get away with it.

At the same time, grass-roots mobilization becomes more and more difficult. People are forced to receive distinguished guests, to attend meetings of the single party in the State and to provide "voluntary labour" and the measures designed to reduce the margin for individual and popular initiatives are almost always taken by the powers that be without consulting the people.

No wonder then that in the current circumstances, popular participation in development cannot be elicited without alarming those governments that know they would not be in power if the people had a choice in the matter.

The question becomes one of empowering the people without giving them the chance to choose their own leaders, set their own objectives, organize things their own way and, in short, choose their own economic, social, cultural and political options.

The dilemma of many African Governments is that this issue continues to exercise their minds.

It is therefore clear that popular participation both in terms of form and objectives is a political issue and no purpose would be served by tackling it technocratically.

The question now is to see what are the practical problems preventing African people from enjoying their legitimate right to decide for themselves

Here, we are not advocating any ideology, whatever be the hue. All those ideologies that have led to the establishment of ruling parties have failed to prevent those parties and their leaders from the coming communities organized to crush any initiatives that "have led any modification whatsoever in their exercise of power.

All the major currents of ideology have experienced periods in which they have been dehumanized and during which countless human lives have been sacrificed in order

to cling to power. No body can give others lessons in this area and nearly all countries of the world have had their dark ages.

As Africans, we need have no complex in this regard. But that does not in any way excuse the arbitrariness and insecurity which have forced millions of people in many African countries to leave their villages and families and emigrate abroad in search of refuge. Africa has the sad record of having half the world's refugees. It is time we called a spade a spade.

Because of protocol diplomatic expediency, people fight shy of attacking the root of the problem and either skirt or avoid the issue all together.

This Conference will be falling short of its objectives if it confines itself to rehashing in the neutral and general tones of pseudo-scientific terminology the obviously democratic problems impeding the participation of people in development.

Academic and general phraseology tend to put everybody at ease by not singling people out for censure when they should be made to assume their responsibilities.

Africans have been obliged to expatriate themselves because those who wield power leave those who would contest their legitimacy no other alternative than armed struggle or coups d'Etat if they want to recover all or part of the power exercised over all or part of the national territory.

In many African countries, it is not even possible to express an opinion or to make economic and social policy proposals without risk of imprisonment if international opinion does not come to your aid.

It may be wondered how people can be expected to participate when they cannot even think aloud.

It may equally be wondered how they can contribute responsibly to activities on which they are not allowed to express an opinion.

The stark and simple reality is that the degree of peoples participation is in direct proportion to the degree of freedom that their governments allow. Therefore, governments are entirely to blame when the people become passive.

We do know that Africans are not the only wayward lambs and that in other countries outside of Africa the same ills and avatars have reared their ugly heads inhibiting popular initiatives. From McCarthy to Stalin by way of Salazar and Sékou Touré, many people have been reduced to silence.

The framework

This is the context in which popular participation in development is to be placed. The role, nature and purpose of popular participation depend on the framework and the context in which it is to be exercised. The framework is geographically circumscribed while the context is more historically and culturally so.

The framework is the socio-political and socio-economic environment which, for most African countries, is characterized by: national poverty whatever be the parameters

used to define such poverty; a national population made up mostly of rural and illiterate people; rapid and disorderly urbanization; more or less apparent ethnic tensions; slow and undirected industrialization; a contested government which rules by force; a population made up predominantly of the young, elderly and under-aged.

The context is characterized by: very rapid historical evolution; cultural changes that are dominated and organized anti-thetically to Africa; poor economies that are virtually submerged and devoid of any prospects for local people; and a succession of natural disasters that seem to gyrate around Africa.

The two concepts obviously overlap in great measure and will be used interchangeably in the course of this paper.

Curiously, people facing such a hostile environment should have resigned themselves to defeatism and the dependency which naturally results.

The people of Africa have been subjected to economic migration outside the continent but this concerns a small minority of less than one per cent in black Africa.

This is the occasion to pay deserving tribute to the African farmer, particularly the Sahelian, who, after 20 years of drought continues, every year as the rains approach, to take heart and to till his/her land with admirable faith in Nature and in God.

Arbitrariness

The essential element of the African panorama or the environment in which African people have to live is arbitrariness. Generally, the Head of State has an army armed to the teeth to quell any revolt on the part of his people. The army and the police generally perform one another's functions. A police army that is not educated enough to understand its role as an institution perceives it as that of a praetorian guard that should defend and protect the leader and be used against any opposition, including the people themselves.

Because external threats are generally non-existent for most African countries, such armed forces and police happen to be trained more in crushing popular rebellion than in waging war in the event of external aggression.

A classic example was the case of the Comoros where a mercenary army better equipped and trained than the national army was able to rout the national army and go on to choose the Head of State under the very noses of the people who were powerless to resist.

The question that arises is what popular participation can mean in such a context. The question deserves to be seriously considered and concretely answered taking into account the situation in which the people find themselves because they cannot mobilize themselves if the framework in which they live fails to provide them with a modicum of security.

Contempt

Another instrument by which the people are crushed is constituted by the bloated civil service whose officials not only tax the people inordinately but also hold in contempt the very people they are supposed to be serving.

Together with the police and armed forces, the civil service considers itself as an instrument of the powers that be. In that capacity, it uses its influence with those in authority to dominate the people.

All the structures of State control then become sources of revenue and corruption becomes a fact of life. African States have expenditure budgets that generally exceed their tax income and therefore turn a blind eye to corruption because it enables them to make the people pay the wage remuneration that they themselves cannot pay to their civil servants. The State therefore allows corruption without ever admitting it because it knows full well that every citizen is hustling on the job and moonlighting in order to make up for the poor and often delayed salaries they receive from the State.

The people therefore suffer the law imposed by civil servants having the means to control and intimidate because the people themselves are ignorant of their rights and therefore pay bribes and provide other prerequisites to which the civil servants have no right.

Obviously, there are exceptions to the rule because we know very well that not all civil servants in Africa are corrupt.

Obviously, not all the armed forces in Africa are ignorant of their institutional role as defenders of their country and not the defenders of personal power.

And yet, if we take Africa as a whole, the Heads of State who have been installed in office after duly contested elections can be counted on the fingers.

The Generals and Police Commissioners who can clearly distinguish between the maintenance of law and order, peace-keeping, the defence of institutions and that of personal power and who are prepared to risk having nothing to do with the protection of personal power can be counted on the fingers. So can the civil servants who are prepared to resign when given directives which go against the grain of their functions.

Finally, it is significant that out of 50 African Governments, the number of ministers who throughout the last 30 years have dared to resign can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

In such circumstances where the most influential and most informed people refuse almost systematically to face their responsibilities squarely, it would be nigh impossible for the people to take initiatives, let alone participate in development.

Legality, legitimacy and morality

The legal framework by which society is organized and the rights and responsibilities of citizens defined happens to be formulated, as a general rule, in foreign languages with a complex terminology and semantics that only professionals can

understand. Laws are drafted, promulgated and imposed on people who are mostly illiterate with no one taking the trouble to translate for them.

The legal framework goes as far as to copy the procedures, jurisprudence and methods of the ancient colonial judges down to their wigs and gowns. When people who cannot understand the meaning, the essence, the aesthetics, the ethics and the culture which has given birth to these scenarios, charades and costumes come to court they are bewildered and frightened by what they see and hear.

Modern legislation has been borrowed from a civilization which has time and again in history demonstrated its contempt for the cultural foundations of African civilization. This explains the psychological difficulties experienced by fellow Africans especially in the rural areas. The people to blame are the intellectual minority which has been moulded in the civilization of the colonial powers whose authority they have inherited and which they seek to exercise by being quick but intellectually lazy in copying their masters.

It would appear today that an essential job remains to be done which for not having been done earlier, might be responsible for the isolation of our people. Indeed, if 30 years after independence, from 70 to 80 per cent of the African people live outside of modern law, it is because that law was never made for them or for them to understand.

The consequence is that the people are often punished for acts that are perfectly legitimate in terms of the norms and standards of their civilization and values.

The modern laws are established to set down rules of conduct on which there is no national consensus because their moral bases do not at times secure unanimity. They deeply undermine the preparedness of the people to participate in activities or projects whose importance they do not know and whose interest they do not share.

Many are the times when people who have lived for thousand of years on their land which they have cared for in terms of balance between themselves and the environment are forced to move away because their land had been decreed to become a national park.

It remains to be ascertained whether people can be asked to participate in an endeavour without being told the rules and purpose of the undertaking.

Participation

The African population is structured into family organizations which lead to the level of clans and on to that of tribes.

This is no schoolboy's theory. The fact is that African people constitute a population whose culture and civilization is community oriented. It is first organized along blood lines after which come family bonds within patrilineal or matrilineal frameworks.

This is the type of organization still operating in the rural areas after thousands of years of contact with Arab and Western civilization. It is also the type of organization operating in the urban areas among members of the same community when they manage to come together and even in Europe among immigrants from black Africa.

People consider that their first allegiance is to the extended family and that the sense of responsibility of each person within the family has a bearing on others of that family and that if one individual commits an offence, the blame lies at the door of the family.

For that reason, the family has to see to it that each member carries its name responsibly, otherwise any family member committing an offence will bring reproach to the entire family.

The rules of conduct are therefore organized in such a way as to give the family head sufficient authority to be able to demand of each member an attitude which falls in line with the overall conduct of the family. Any deviation from or refusal to participate in the making or the consolidation of such rules of conduct bring physical or moral punishment to the perpetrator and this can go as far as excommunication from the family or banishment.

It is very surprising to note that most or nearly all African countries, in black Africa at least, have never had prisons.

Had it not been for community education, banishment would never have been an effective sanction against people who infringed the social rules in Africa. In any case, imprisonment has yet to prove an effective sanction whether in the country of Al Capone or in any other country. It will be worth considering how almost all of a continent was governed without anybody being imprisoned.

It is in this direction that further research should be conducted and perhaps orientations found for a society on which cultural patterns it has neither been able to live with nor assimilate have been imposed. Organization by clan and to some extent that of the family based on the oldest known living member were, together with the size of the tribe, often determined by the communication facilities available within the piece of geography in which the tribe lived.

The land area occupied by the tribe was also determined by the level of communication or the facilities for communication.

This was how the countries of the Sahel came to be large empires in the past because the rules of political organization could be extended over large areas since communication and movement were relatively easier and made it possible to disseminate policy measures and decisions taken by the authorities responsible for organizing the life of the nation as a whole.

The result in every case is that most Africans, especially in the rural areas, consider their community as the framework in which they live and to which they owe their first allegiance.

The solidarity of the family and the tribal group is often far more perennial and far more immediate and spontaneous than such other forms as political and trade union solidarity based on enlightened self interest.

In contrast, solidarity with the village, the family and the tribe is properly understood because it is integrated into the cultural framework: the cultural mould in

which we have been cast, trained, educated and in which we have enjoyed for a whole phase in life the solidarity of everyone else.

This has been maintained in the rural areas and more deeply so than is thought because the village associations and all the other forms of grouping that exist today are founded on the clan or tribal lines which exist among the various partners, according to historical relationships within families and within the immediate environment. People are also part of a sociological context and a changing culture that should be taken into account.

African people have not been prepared for the inevitable changes occurring in the world. Nor are they basically equipped to be able to survive the changes and control them since information is monopolized by countries more concerned with propagating their cultural model and thereby expanding their zone of commercial and monetary influence.

The African farmer has no choice in the information he receives. He has no training that will enable him to make such a choice and he does not in any case have the ability to do so.

Those who are responsible for training him to improve on his ability to choose merely content themselves with giving him a propaganda and personality cult brain washing at the same time as they censor any outside influences that might reduce the impact of official propaganda.

Women

The framework for popular participation is limited by the status of African women, neutralized as they are by traditional rules that give them only responsibilities and duties but no power or very limited power in the organization of the family and society. In certain countries, the modern laws define rights unsuited to the African context and which therefore go unrespected. It should be noted here that the intellectual laziness of African jurists makes them often copy legal rules formulated for another civilization. Allowance should be made for societies in transition.

Political will and education are required to ensure that African society moves gradually towards a legal framework that provides for a better sharing of power between women (who in many countries ensure the survival of the family) and men (who currently hold all the political power). Women are too neutralized to participate effectively in the making of policy decisions making that they are largely responsible for implementing both at the production and at the social level.

Food production, together with mother and child care, are almost entirely the responsibility of women.

Youth

In traditional society, African youth were the engine for development because their peer groups were responsible for carrying out infrastructural work when they were not engaged in the defence of the land. Today, African youth have lost their bearings and are increasingly losing their cultural roots because they continue to be bombarded by the international media which mainly present a Western cultural pattern.

Such patterns appear to be utopias of freedom, economic and social well-being whereas the lack of genuine economic progress in Africa, particularly in the rural areas, drives the youth to migrate. Life in Africa appears to be one of misery, insecurity, abuse of power, parental, family or tribal authority while the Western pattern seems to symbolize happiness, financial and monetary power and luxury.

One consequence of this physiological hang-up on the youth is that Africa has fallen prey to rapid urbanization and been overwhelmed by the speed at which the towns are growing. The incapability of society at large to check this trend, together with the accompanying collapse of morals, is eating away at the moral fibre of African society as unemployment, prostitution, drug addiction and banditry become rampant.

In contrast to the village where everyone is known and related to a family, the town makes for going incognito and only the police are interested in identifying people. Nobody knows anybody. Towns therefore become the best breeding ground for immoral characters who worm their way through the social fabric and use the widespread indifference and lack of interpersonal communication to cheat, steal, kill and enrich themselves.

The urban environment where tradition should be adapted to the narrowness of available space has imposed co-existence among different ethnic groups since in looking for work or for housing, the immigrant seldom has the possibility of choosing his neighbours. Proximity and promiscuity have also promoted inter-tribal marriages which have given birth to new generations that cannot be identified with any specific geographical zone other than the town.

In the urban area where individualism is well ingrained in people who have the common denominator of having come in search of individual monetary gain, motivation for popular participation will necessarily take a form different from that of village communities.

The framework is finally a world situation organized by nobody knows whom but most obviously well organized in favour of the rich countries.

With all the Bretton Woods institutions imposing economic, financial and commercial mechanisms on everybody, the poor and weak have no chance whatsoever.

Politically, it would appear that African States are incapable of changing the situation in any way at all, disadvantaged as they are by the framework. All the poor countries together command less power than the seven richest countries and this explains why the leaders of the World Bank, the IMF and related institutions can afford to be intransigent.

In the United Nations Organization, not all the folklore of traditional dressing and other paraphernalia mean anything because no decision can be taken and implemented without the consent of the richest countries. The United Nations only manages to solve the essential problems of the world when the most powerful nations have decided that it is time for them to be settled.

In most cases, decisions are aligned with the interest of the rich countries Members of the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF and other institutions. No wonder that there is much reason to be skeptical about the power of States or even the preparedness

of nations to seek a just solution to a prevailing crisis from which not all member countries are suffering to the same degree. In a framework which is as inhibiting of individual effort as it is of collective effort, it is proper to wonder whether popular participation might not even be used against the people themselves and to ask what kind of solutions could be found.

The spread of revolution throughout the world has already proved revolutionaries to be capable of transforming themselves into dictators. If the world is the way it is, it is so because society, as currently conceived, bears within itself the qualities and fallings of human beings as they are and not as they might have been.

This does not mean that we should resign ourselves to the situation and take it for granted that human beings are intrinsically unfair and that since it is only human nature, we might as well accept the extinction of the African race in the medium term.

It is to be wondered whether the situation of Africa arises from a curse imposed on the race by a supernatural being or whether Africans, in their life as Africans, have been living too much in the past and because of that anachronistic attitude, have been doomed to date to suffer from all the forms of humiliations, slavery, colonization and lately, underdevelopment which one form or a more subtle expression which covers the same reality.

Indeed, both slavery and colonization consisted of making people produce what they did not have the power to place a value on. Slaves and colonized people are compelled to produce or else ...

The question is whether anything has changed today about the situation.

The value of African products is decided outside of Africa on a market where Africans have no negotiating power.

Competition among countries of the South is orchestrated by way of extending credit to potential rivals competition with any producers that sell dearly to the processing industries of the countries of the North.

Even when producer countries produce a surplus, the buying countries express their dissatisfaction by branding the products as uncompetitive.

This is the actual context within which NGOs are requesting the United Nations to organize this Conference

What do we expect from this meeting?

- If African States do not have the means, the capacity and in certain cases even the resolve to change the situation of the continent;

- If in spite of all the negotiations and arrangements made for centuries and in spite of all the wars, massacres and domination, the countries of the entire world have not been able to get Africa out of its situation;

- If all the attempts made to date from the top to address the plight of the grass-roots or by the elite to improve the lot of grass-roots people have yielded no results.

Then objective today is to attempt what has never really been done before and to empower the people first of all to take care of themselves and then create among all such people throughout the world a chain of solidarity which, from all the evidence, will stand the chance of being more solid than the bonds existing among States. The States of the world, particularly the States of Africa, should set up machinery to facilitate popular expression and genuine participation in the mechanisms through which decisions affecting their people are taken.

Every individual will have to contribute to the creation of such an environment, of a situation in which everyone assumes responsibilities for themselves and can, through solidarity with others, take initiatives that will support other people in solving their problems.

For us, the empowerment of the people is the condition without which there can be no popular participation. The people can participate only when they hold responsibility for their activities and initiatives and when such initiatives are enabled, authorized and legalized each time that they are legitimate. Such activities and initiatives are legitimate each time that the lives of the people are concerned.

If today popular participation is high on the agenda and if today everyone throughout the world has come to the conclusion that the people must needs participate, it is because in the development process we have experienced failures that were all the more resounding because the programmes were ambitious. It is because the development programmes which have succeeded each other have more or less completely failed because they were designed, prepared, considered, analyzed, organized and what have you ... for the people. It is because the fact is dawning on people that between macro-economic aggregates and the realities to which they are supposed to refer, there are people who must invest their energies and resources in order to create wealth. It is because commercial or marketable production seems to be the sole preoccupation of economy who have decided policy over the last few centuries. Such priorities are not the major concern of people, particularly in the poor countries.

It is therefore the failure of economic and social development policies which has resulted in the current understanding of the need to seek an alternative that gives less pride of place to narrow-minded economic considerations.

Economics has become a game of aggregates and parameters which focus on people only in terms of their cost and the contribution they can make to the market while the evidence shows that the crucial factor is political and therefore people-centred.

It is therefore the ineffectiveness of development programmes and the stagnation of the economies of countries with authoritarian regimes which have drawn the attention of development experiments to the inescapable need for popular participation. And yet, there is nothing new about popular participation because for more than 30 years voices have been raised to draw the attention of the international community to the human dimension of economic and social development.

Indeed, for Professor Perroux, development was the combination of attitudinal and social changes which made people capable of cumulatively increasing their gross output on a sustained basis.

This definition which, already before the 1960s placed people at the centre of the development process, was obviously borne out of the experience of developmental activities which had resulted in the polemics on the meaning of development as opposed to economic growth.

At this stage, the debate seemed to be taking shape in terms of the necessarily human character of development while economic growth had, in the course of history, imposed on most of the population inhuman living conditions.

The accumulation even of illegitimate wealth did not act as a brake on the growth of the national domestic product.

In contrast, the immoral nature of the gap separating the rich from the poor, the competition among the rich and the acceleration of the rat race dehumanized the rich or those who had some chance of becoming rich.

The result is that inhuman conditions are imposed on people trying to earn their living, the physical environment seriously deteriorates through the dumping of toxic wastes, human beings are affected by drug addiction and crime and society becomes divided into communities that do not mutually support each other.

All these constitute nothing short of anti-development.

Development

Development would therefore be the set of attitudes that enable people to ensure that their national economy grows comprehensively and sustainably.

Many new attitudes and orientations have been developed out of this new approach but it was necessary to await the results of many economic activities conducted at the grass-roots level in order to ascertain the basically human nature of economic and social development.

The French-speaking countries of Africa for example have launched rural and (later) urban development programmes in order to create conditions for the more effective integration and mobilization of the energies of the people towards the implementation of development plans. Many regulatory measures were taken by the authorities imposing forms of groupings, of organization and of action which contradicted the very objective of people's empowerment.

The stereotyped co-operative movement imposed by the Government and leaving no room for flexibility, for specificity and originality became completely discredited in the eyes of the people.

Finally, acknowledging the need for popular participation in development is not new. Everyone acknowledges this need including the World Bank together with the IMF which are the flag-bearers in technocratic economics. Today, everyone admits that there can be no development without popular participation.

If so, then the question that needs to be asked is how the people can develop if their gasoil, engines, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc., should come from abroad and if no policy is envisaged to change the state of affairs. It could also be asked how the people can develop if they have no means of influencing the price of these products whereas the prices of their products are determined by the State (domestic prices), by international organizations and the foreign stock markets of Paris, New York, Tokyo, etc.

What resources can be used for urban development when no machines are manufactured locally, when no technologies are developed locally to meet the needs of the people and when the people themselves have no voice in deciding the kind of consumer goods that the emerging industries would produce?

Development cannot be merely sustaining an increase in market and monetary values, even over a long period of time. It should necessarily involve the people in the choice of civilization and on the basis of their needs.

Commenting on the World Bank document entitled "Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth", a Senegalese journalist said that man cannot be the beneficiary of economic growth and remain on the sideline in the process whereas his welfare is the best indicator of whatever development has taken place. This statement adequately sums up the concerns of the majority of Africans faced with the structural adjustment measures imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, and which seem to imply the sacrifice of our cultural identity for a stricter alignment with the world of selfishness and crime, with no hope of building our ideal common welfare.

This is why we in the Réseau africain pour le développement intégré (RADI) consider development not as a state or a situation but rather as a process which should lead to the improvement of the living conditions of people with their recovered resources.

For RADI, development is a global process by which a people cover and invest their resources in accordance with their cultural values to solve individual and collective problems by consistently evolving a better quality of life. This should result from a lasting and dynamic interaction between the natural environment and the socio-cultural framework of the people.

Such a concept of development as a qualitative improvement of the life of the people in stages over a long period of time entails:

(a) That the needs and choices defined by the people themselves are taken into account in a participatory framework which embodies everyone's efforts;

(b) That production does not remain a process whereby natural and human resources are merely destroyed on account of short-term considerations.

It is important that the people cover their own resources and bring them into play to solve their own problems and to create better conditions at each stage. In solving their problems and in creating successively superior stages of development from the recovery of the available resources, the people can direct the thrust of development to serve their cultural purposes and exercise their socio-political will to organize their civilization in their own way.

If development does not simultaneously involve or imply the possibility to choose one's path, it will only be a copy of other peoples' processes and would result in putting on the international and national market surplus goods produced by other societies more advanced than ourselves in terms of technology, in terms of delivery time and in terms of the organization of the production of these goods.

We find ourselves labelled as uncompetitive because we want to produce things that other people learned to produce centuries ago for their own use and which are appropriate to their cultures, instead of seeking to produce what is useful to us and pertinent to our culture. African economies are all outward-looking. We seek to sell all that we produce to countries of the North as though we ourselves had no specific needs that we can address by dint of our own effort.

If we have relegated ourselves to remaining nothing more than a market for the rich countries, what can we expect of our people?

Is it realistic to want to integrate ourselves into the consumer society without producing anything for ourselves?

The fact that we know of these needs and that we are prepared to address them in line with the depths of our culture that we know more than anyone else provides us with better chances of standing up to competition from the more technically advanced countries.

Development necessarily implies the adoption of civilizing options. It cannot be mere accumulation of revenue and it cannot be the copying of structures built elsewhere with a view to enriching one part of the community while the other part is crushed.

Development means the freedom to choose the process and partners for development because in as far as private and individual development can be envisaged, development based on family, clan or any other type of community can also be envisaged.

The acquisition of financial and economic resources is obviously the way we are compelled to go in order to create the life-style that conforms to our culture and civilization. However, the framework has to be based on the participation of the majority of the African population since the people serve as the point of reference for development activities.

The Director of the Sahel desk at the World Bank held a press conference during which he said something to the following effect:

"Mr. Gillette feels that account should be taken of social realities which, in Africa show a cleavage between modern society (10 to 30 per cent of the people) and the society termed traditional. In his view, the Governments concerned should cope with these realities using appropriate strategies to involve grass-roots communities.

Development should begin from the grass-roots. So long as Mr. Gillette considers political pluralism as a necessity, he should consider such grass-roots associations as village groups along with NGOs as full partners in the process of development."

The power of the media which have enabled foreigners to impose their cultural life-style on us will also enable them, should we fail to react speedily, to transform us into mere consumers of finished goods. The progress achieved in terms of technology and distribution by the dominant economic powers can also make us lastingly dependent in terms of ensuring our survival when we sell our birthright for them to bury their toxic wastes.

What popular participation should mean, in particular, for African NGOs

Popular participation is the set of activities whereby people bring their human, material and natural resources to bear in addressing problems that they have themselves identified in ways decided upon by themselves. As such, popular participation is possible only when the people have been empowered or given the right to decide policy and to join hands in thinking out and embarking upon collective or individual activities.

In countries where the rights of individuals are so curtailed that it is dangerous to consult each other, it is obvious that there can be no popular participation even if in certain countries the single party in power may, imitating the type of mobilization organized in the past by the communist parties of the East, force the people more or less to provide labour in a way which has nothing to do with popular participation in development.

Participation naturally comes with the right to choose and the right to object. Participation is not decreed. Neither is it imposed by propaganda or by threat. There is no participation when people expect rewards from organizers.

A prisoner doing hard labour cannot be said to be participating.

To varying degrees, people can be considered, in certain cases, to be subjected to forced labour and it is inadmissible to call that participation. Participation unavoidably means that the people should be empowered and given responsibilities.

To the extent that private or collective resources need to be mobilized with individual and collective efforts, there is a need to come to an understanding about how such resources shall be invested and for that matter, how the dividend shall be shared. All these issues imply that the information circulating among development partners should be of high quality.

First of all, the flow of information should not be impeded among the people. Nor should it contain anything other than what the people wish to circulate. Manipulations, injunctions, threats and other coercive measures should cease.

So also should the tampering with, filtering and censoring of information on the pretext that the people are not mature enough to decide for themselves and that the public authorities should protect them from disinformation.

African people are perfectly capable of choosing the information useful for them

Empowering the poor

In almost all African countries it is difficult not to doubt the political will of the governments to promote genuine popular participation with:

- (a) Agriculture being the predominant sector of our economies;
- (b) Africa's slow development being systematically attributed to low agricultural productivity; and
- (c) All African Governments proclaiming agriculture to be a priority sector:

it becomes difficult to understand that African farmers who constitute the majority and represent the traditional sector do not have any possibility of influencing political, economic and social decisions concerning the country.

All the occupational groups such as transporters, workers, employers and civil servants are better listened to by the authorities than the rural population who, it is assumed, should always be told what to do.

By facilitating contacts, urbanization has helped urban social groups to organize themselves and to be mobilized more quickly. However, because of the proximity of urban people who wield power, they constitute a more direct threat to the authorities and are therefore accorded greater attention.

It is important to understand that no government that desires to safeguard its power will restore it to the people, if it fears that mobilization of the people or its attendant repercussions could lead to the loss of power.

It is for this reason that in some countries such as Senegal, rural leadership programmes, after having raised a lot of awareness among the people, are stifled by the Government because their dynamism curtailed the powers of the single party. Officials of such programmes who were invariably almost all from the lead party, soon gained a lot of attention from the people and quickly went on to become ministers; this was seen as a threat by the professionals of the party. The threat posed by the awareness of the people to the single party was accompanied by another threat for those who put all their personal hopes in the party and who saw grass-roots professionals grass-roots trained in specialized schools and government workers as coming to block their chances of advancement.

The same fate has befallen many actions taken to empower the people, not only in Senegal but throughout Africa. A case in point is co-operative movement. During the 1960s, all or almost all African countries launched co-operative movements, which were forced upon the people by the authorities, as the only form of grouping authorized by the public authorities.

However, State intervention overstepped its bounds. Under the pretext of organizing the people, the State influenced the election of leaders and delayed the recognition of co-operative and pre-co-operative groupings indefinitely when the leaders refused to be controlled and in some cases to be manipulated by the public authorities or by local representatives of the single party.

As a result of this, the people deserted the co-operative movement because they felt deprived, frustrated and manipulated through the activities of the very group in that they had hoped would give them greater independence in decision-making that would enable them take a hold of their lives, the economy and their resources.

Our Conference is not aimed at bringing popular participation under control because by controlling it we destroy it. Our aim is rather to promote popular participation by establishing the right atmosphere for it to develop by itself.

All initiatives that have been under the control of the government have been side-tracked from their objectives and the leaders manipulated by those who wield political power.

It clearly becomes the responsibility of those who really believe in the contribution of popular participation in development, to promote it by regenerating popular dynamism that would allow people to think for themselves.

Regaining self-confidence

This primarily involves helping the people, particularly rural people, who have often been forbidden to act on their own initiative and even to think aloud to regain self-confidence. In most African countries today, these people are caught up in a passive existence which should be taken loose now by helping them to regain self-confidence.

At present, this change is indispensable for Africa. It seems to me that we cannot wait for the authorities to effect such change. Where such a change has not already been initiated, action should be taken to bring it into being because it can no longer wait.

What we are proposing is not the substitution of the incumbent authorities by another political parties but rather the change or elimination of high-handed regimes which impede the development of our countries by inhibiting the creativity, mobilization and ingenuity of the people.

A development NGO cannot shirk its responsibility without at the same time discrediting itself, because such responsibility is not theoretical but a fact of life. It involves defending the people and increasing their negotiating and decision-making power.

Mankind has not found a better form of social organization other than that which delegates political power to a select group of people. However when the leaders team up to monopolize power and to prevent the people from taking part in decision-making, then the people should get together to take back the delegated powers.

It is important that we speak frankly about these issues because if we settle for diplomatic language we only risk leaving this conference without having addressed the council problems. Limitations on freedom are not imposed by the people but rather by the legally or illegally established powers. It is the political powers who limit initiatives of the people for reasons of sovereignty or public order, reasons which strangely serve the interests of those in power and who want to keep such power.

An overly sensitive government that refuses the people the right to take initiatives because of the fear that the uncontrolled expression of opinion will cost it its power, in any case, stands condemned. Governments should stop controlling people, manipulating them, using them to serve their interest and holding them back. Recent events in the people's democracies should be a warning even to the most intransigent.

NGOs are apolitical, in other words they are not alternative powers. They have neither common political solutions nor miraculous remedies that would be apt for all countries and all peoples of the world. However, they must, of necessity join with the people and serve as a means of solidarity among them, promoting the attainment by the people of their development through their own initiatives.

Our objective is not to recommend one party rather than the other or to incite the people to vote for one party or the other. What we want is simply to create, together with the people, or assist them to create themselves the appropriate tools for self-reliance and freedom.

In some cases, such emancipation will necessarily be against some one, as in the case of economic emancipation. In other cases, a lot of effort would have to be deployed to bring it about as in the case where some people or social groups have monopolized the resources for such emancipation and refuse to relinquish them however legitimate might be the claims of the people.

The State should seriously and democratically disengage itself

In certain instances, the role of NGOs is that of education, preparation, training and information that would enable the people concerned to formulate, by themselves, their own strategy for emancipation and adopt their own plan of action and mobilization.

Ideally, in such situations, the State should do its utmost to promote freedom of the grass-roots as well as their mobilization to participate in development.

Political powers run a risk in wanting to promote the most un influential social group, even if their aim is economic and social development. This implies that most foreign countries, generally very influential, do not associate with the social groups which do not favour popular participation. It is unacceptable to preach to the world about human rights while remaining friendly with all the dictators.

Democracy, even for the State, implies accepting the possibility of losing power, as a consequence of the judgement of the people on government policies. This is indispensable if popular participation is to be promoted. The "welfare mentality" often associated with the "Welfare State" which has for a long time accustomed the people to depend on the State should be eradicated.

Today, Government does not have the resources for taking care of everything for everyone and the international financial institutions, through the leverage of structural adjustment financing, are increasingly limiting its room for manoeuvre.

However, the rush with which structural adjustment programmes have been carried out, and the inadequate analysis of the measures taken have led to social problems because adjustment had not been discussed and the prescribed methods and targets not negotiated. Structural adjustment becomes the diktat of an international financial institution or a diabolical mechanism instituted by the apparatus of that institution, who in any case, are not affected by the shocks and consequences of such programmes.

Suddenly and without warning, Governments shirked their onerous responsibilities by transferring them on to the shoulders of the impoverished population, striving for their survival after living through many years of crisis.

The State should re-educate its personnel to give more liberty to the people, to stop insisting that everything should be cleared through its red tape which inhibits the people, stifles their initiative and finally discourage them.

In countries where the Government does not want to take the initiative to promote popular participation, for whatever reason, it is necessary for grass-roots associations which are springing up all over Africa to gradually assert themselves and begin to take initiatives.

The establishment of a solidarity chain, first at national level and then at international level will limit the freedom of manoeuvre of the public authorities vis-à-vis the people, because the people cannot indefinitely be kept in the background by sheer force of arms. Governments should create an enabling environment for those who want to strive to improve their welfare.

Economic recovery and development are not technocratic concepts, they are political concepts which call for collective decision-making on how best society might be organized for the effective attainment of the objectives of the community concerned.

Economic recovery and development objectives should, therefore, be formulated on the basis of discussion among all concerned. Pitch-forked programmes have very little chance of unleashing the energies and mobilizing the resources of the people. However, when the people are convinced that the mobilization of their resources will have direct consequences on their status, living conditions and welfare, and that the results will not be taken away from them then they will gradually begin to work at such mobilization.

The people know their problems. They know them better than anybody else because they live with them and also usually are partly aware of the possible solutions. It is therefore necessary to eliminate the obstacles which prevent the people from organizing themselves to confront these problems, even if one of the problems, and may be the most important, is government bureaucracy.

Other problems

Government is not the only obstacle, because once power has been gained or seized, ethnic problems arising from the rules of social living based on relationships of solidarity starting from the family up to the clan, tribe and village level remain or emerge. Such problems interfere in all collective decision-making, from the choice of leaders to the determination of priorities.

In addition to this are religious problems which sometimes manage to cause a breach in family solidarity but which most often lie at the root of the differences of opinion which divide communities on objectives.

Finally, there is also the fact that the most powerful media in the world are in those countries where consumers decide what should be done or what should be marketed. Such media have to sell themselves and as such write what the consumer would accept to buy.

Africa has for too long been presented and sold as a miserable, ridiculous and backward continent.

Today, everyone would be surprised to see that there is another Africa, the real Africa represented by 90 per cent of its population struggling for the solution to its problems. If the media are only going to cash in on news that sell, who is going to explain to the people of the North that the comfort in which they live is causing the misery of other people and that it represent a serious danger for the survival of our planet because of the unbearable pressure on the environment?

A poor, unproductive African continent, incapable of feeding its population and totally dependent on the charity of the rich countries has never existed. Today, people are fed up with this image and it inspires neither pity nor solidarity any longer. This image of Africa is a sustained lie, annoying to Africans who, unfortunately, have so little influence on the media market that their viewpoints are neither heeded nor disseminated, perhaps because they have no commercial importance.

The NGOs of the North have fewer and fewer opportunities for explaining to their people the unjust nature of the world as it operates at present. They increasingly have to refrain from taking their responsibilities since they depend on the will of their governments to cover their institutional costs.

The countries of the North have since the famous Bretton Woods meeting manipulated the economic, financial, commercial and political organization of the world in order to foster their development and to preserve their interests to the detriment of the poorer nations.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it should be said that the African NGOs meeting in Nairobi on 12 April 1985 in preparation for the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to the Critical Economic and Social Crisis in Africa set as a precondition for the development of Africa, the enhancement of freedoms and the creation at national and international levels, of conditions capable of encouraging the participation of the people in development.

International organizations such as (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, GATT and the United Nations) should establish machinery for monitoring the development of world economic, financial and socio-political parameters.

Because international economic procedures are defined and maintained by those who have international economic power, the financial systems are strengthened, distorted and regularly obstructed in an orchestrated fashion by the Powers in the North, collaboration with the World Bank, the IMF and other multilateral structures established for this purpose.

Need any one be surprised that for more than 40 years now and in spite of all the theories and research on development and in spite of the often very courageous initiatives taken by governments of the South, none of their States has been able to actually join the ranks of the developed countries.

On the contrary, we have entered an era where the indebtedness of Third World countries has reached the stage where they do not obtain enough funds from their current international trade to repay their debts. Obstacles imposed on international trade and on the price of raw materials by countries in the North, UNCTAD, GATT, the World Bank and the IMF help to sustain the unjust situation.

If the distribution of power in the international institutions appears stilted, it is because those thus bereft of no power have no possibility of demanding a change in the state of affairs, while those who have the power are unwilling to yield even the minutest portion.

The world is therefore saddled with an arms race because force is the only convincing argument. The result is that those who are powerful employ all possible strategies to prevent those who are not from becoming powerful and to reach the stage where they could threaten the order established by the rich.

Nothing happens in the financial world that the seven or eight richest countries do not wish to happen. These countries have even instituted periodic meetings to work out the evolution of world currencies.

The lamentating most of the countries in the South appear to fall on brick walls when they complain about the debt, debt servicing, commodity prices, fluctuations in the dollar, etc. because all these are strategic ploys which cannot be activated without leverage and those who hold the power for doing so have no desire to relinquish it.

The NGOs represent a minor power in this international structure. Their weakness is accentuated by the very wide diversity and total independence among them. Diversity only becomes a weakness when there is no efficient co-ordination to bring about harmony in terms of objectives, methods, principles, motivations and understanding of the natural and human phenomena which they all wish to address.

However, the effectiveness of the actions taken by the NGOs have earned them the attention of people worldwide. In the North, many people are affected by the frequency of the human drama that afflicts our continent, and want to contribute towards ending the cycle of catastrophes. Whatever their motives, be they sentimental, religious, cultural or otherwise, they have inspired the creation of the intervention machinery now known as NGOs.

The NGOs therefore hold hopeful prospects for the people, who perceive in their diversity and benevolence intimation of that abregation which, more eloquently than any speech solidarity and compassion that they wish to address to the destitute.

The task of NGOs of the North is, therefore, to translate the message of their people into concrete action. The people probably have a certain power to influence their governments, but such power will remain ineffective so long as there is no clear information on the causes of these catastrophes and of the means of remedying them.

Such information should also clarify the role and responsibilities of their countries or of their governments in these crisis. It is on the basis of such education on development that there can be serious mobilization of the people.

To conclude, it should be said that African NGOs meeting in Nairobi on 12 April 1986 to prepare United Nations special session on the crisis in Africa stated as a precondition for the development of Africa the enhancement of freedoms and the creation of international and national conditions that would encourage the participation of people in development.

The Nairobi recommendations were based mainly on the need to accord the people of Africa greater freedom, enabling them to assert themselves to take initiatives and to defend their interests essentially at national level. This means that, and this was the most expression repeated in the Nairobi Document, that the people should participate in development at national level.

Participation, however, does not mean the acceptance to be mobilized at will without taking part in the definition of the rationale behind such mobilization. It is rather a question of participating in the planning, selection and implementation of activities aimed at generating solutions to the problems faced by the people. This would enable them to understand the decisions, to participate in their selection, to draw up priority areas and to apply themselves to carrying them through. It happens that up to now our countries have not been able to accord the people this privilege or this right to decide for themselves.

Governments in Africa have often comported themselves as if they have to solve the problem of the people in the same way as the colonial administrations, which were obliged to give away a few privileges and advantages in order to maintain the peace. However, with the change in the status of the people, Governments will have to change their tendencies by enabling them to assume more responsibility and to assert themselves by allowing them the freedom to decide for themselves the type of society that they would like to build.

All these ideas were reiterated during the United Nations special session by the NGOs at their meetings on the same topics and it seems to me that the key phrase in our conclusions on that occasion was that the solution to the critical socio-economic situation was for the African States to regain control over their sovereignty and natural and human resources, to strengthen their capacity to define development goals, to formulate strategies and to orientate economic activities towards meeting the needs of the people.

The delegates acknowledged that such a fundamental process can only be lasting if the African peoples participate in organization and decision-making at all levels of economic, social and political activity. While the responsibility for regaining control over national sovereignty and resources and over their destiny devolves on the African peoples themselves, to be successful in the current interdependent world, there should be an enabling international environment.

For the NGOs of the North and other international NGOs, this constitutes an appeal for solidarity that the African people are making for concrete support actions.

In the North, this entails solidarity with the dominated and disadvantaged groups of people through concrete actions of support.

What needs to be done is for us to elicit from our people the resolve and confidence to take charge of their own affairs, and once this has been done to launch into actions

for which they have been prepared to assume the responsibilities. Such mobilization of resources at the national level for the benefit of the people will not be radiate to the international level unless an international chain of solidarity extends our action to the grass-roots.