

INTRODUCTION

by Bram Posthumus and Sihle Dube

Debates on development issues evolve rapidly; from the state-centred approach of the 1960s and 1970s to the explosion onto the scene of the free marketeers who took over the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s and declared the state a fairly irrelevant entity. In the meantime, under pressure from civil society in the richer parts of the world, environmental and gender issues were written into the development discourse. All development approaches have at one point in time been described as a kind of *deus ex machina*, the solution to maybe not all but certainly many of the poorer nations' problems. Therefore, it is always good to remind ourselves that the basic problems that continue to paralyse the development processes in poor countries remain largely the same. Trade and debt are prime examples of this.

Trade has existed since the beginning of humankind and debt comes not far behind. In modern times, the inequalities that have been built into the world's modern economic system have been in existence since colonial times. Trade is skewed in favour of Europe, North America and Japan and the debt crisis continues to keep countries in unsustainable positions of bondage. This situation persists, in spite of decades of largely academic and ineffective development discussions.

Southern Africa (more specifically: SADC, the Southern African Development Community) is not the only region where the inequities in the world's trade and financial systems play themselves out but it is one of the more pronounced. It also happens to be the region where the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA), the publisher of this brochure, has a special interest. One of the reasons for this is historical: NiZA started its life more than 30 years ago as a solidarity committee for Angola and grew into a respected movement for the liberation of the whole region and subsequently into the information, lobbying and hands-on support institute it is today. Another reason relates to the political economy: there was a tendency to declare the problems of the region over when South Africa liberated itself in 1994. But the problems have intensified of late and this is in no small part due to the massive economic problems most countries in the region face. The odds have been stacked heavily against them both in terms of trade and debt. These twin issues are the subjects of this brochure.

The picture of the region is extremely mixed. The political situation differs widely, from countries emerging from war and trying out more or less democratic political institutions (including Angola, Mozambique, Zambia) to countries that appear to slide inexorably towards meltdown (Zimbabwe) or do not seem to be able to get out of political and/or economic stagnation (like the DR Congo, Malawi and again Zambia). But most of them share a few characteristics. Poverty is widespread. There is an HIV/AIDS crisis of monumental proportions, the economic impact of which has not even begun to be measured. Most governments in the region (with the exception of South Africa and Botswana) have limited and decreasing capacity - and in some cases little political will - to cater to the needs of the civilian population. Most governments rely rather more heavily than is good for them on foreign assistance. And many of them face similar trade and debt issues.

With the brochure, NiZA aims first and foremost to inform. The intended audience consists of policy makers, students of the region, interested individuals and those who consider themselves part of NiZA's support base in Dutch society and elsewhere. The job of informing the public about matters such as trade and debt in poor countries is usually done by established academics and journalists in the North, the rich part of the world. The second purpose of this brochure is to let jour-

nalists and academics from the region itself do most of the talking. And thirdly, this publication seeks to influence. Trade and debt are not the world's sexiest subjects but they impact more powerfully upon peoples' and nations' lives than most issues, with the possible exception of politics. NiZA considers it important to once again draw attention to them and point out that yes, unfair trade persists and hampers progress and no, the debt crisis is nowhere near a solution, contrary to what many appear to think. If the information contained in this brochure seems old, then this should cause alarm bells to start ringing. For this reason alone, it is time these twin issues are pushed once again further up the political agenda.

The composition of the publication is as follows. After this introduction, there will be an executive summary with the main findings. This is followed by an introductory chapter on SADC by the Zimbabwean development economist Takawira Mumvuma: what is SADC and does it work? The second chapter deals with trade issues. First, there is a long section on the kind of trade agreements that exist between principally the European Union (EU) and SADC and how these distort trade inside the region. The other two shorter articles are by Zimbabwean freelance journalist Ish Mafundikwa and Amsterdam-based consultant David Sogge and explore the impact of this forced liberalization on the region and other ways of integrating SADC respectively. Essentially, there are three integration processes on the way simultaneously: one that is foisted upon the region by the EU, one that is slowly but surely taking place as a function of the formal agreements the SADC members states have entered into, and finally, integration at grassroots level.

The third chapter considers debt. First, there is a bird's eye view of the debt situation in the SADC region, followed by a critical assessment of official debt management by the veteran Zambian debt cancellation advocate Charity Musamba. The third article in this chapter deals with the various alternatives that have been offered by the debt campaign group Jubilee 2000. In two smaller separate contributions, South African author Neville Gabriel takes a few pot shots at the moral hazard argument, frequently used by banks to refuse debt cancellation.

The fourth and final chapter takes a look at two ways out of the crises bedevilling the region, one from on high (Nepad) and one from below (civil society). Nepad has been presented as the boldest step yet in advancing Africa's development. Nepad will be described by Zambian journalist Benedict Tembo (with input by the editor) and critically assessed by South African economist Oupa Lehulere. It is interesting to see how Nepad recognises the need to end violent conflict throughout the continent as one of the most important conditions for any economic take-off while at the same time remaining rather mute of the issues of debt cancellation and unfair trade. In the final part of this chapter, South African journalist Glenda Daniels will describe the work done by civil society in her country to advance alternatives from the ground up. The international anti corruption crusader Transparency International has kindly provided details concerning the struggle against corruption, especially on the legal front, in almost all SADC countries, while South African author Thabani Masuku looks at good governance, one of the latest issues to make a grand entrance in the development debate.

As said, this book has been written by academics, activists, journalists and consultants. As a result, styles vary. We hope this variation will encourage you to read on. Geographically, we admit to having failed the test, by relying heavily on the Anglophone axis (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia) for our information. There is no real excuse for this, suffice to say that in spite of the rather limited linguistic scope of the contributions the net is cast so wide as to include all countries in SADC.

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