

Pre-Forum Workshop by Betty Maafo
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As part of its effort to prepare civil society for the First National Forum, which was held on 10-12 November 1998, the Civil Society Coordinating Council, CivisoC, organised a three-day workshop at the Maple Leaf Hotel at Achimota Accra on 15-17 July 1998.

Resource persons for this workshop were Dr. Jones Ofori-Atta, Messers Kwesi Jonah and Kwasi Anyemedu, both lecturers at the University of Ghana, Dr. Nana Enimayew and Professor Ofose Amaah of the School of Public Health, Professor Djangmah (Institute of Economic Affairs), Ms. Esther Offei-Aboagye, a lecturer at GIMPA, Mr. Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, Chairman of CivisoC and Dr. Yao Graham of ISODEC/TWN.

In his welcome address, Mr. Adu-Amankwah explained that the issue papers provided by the CivisoC Technical Committee were based on discussions held during the June 1997 National Conference organised by the civil-society network. The papers were developed to help establish the relationship between adjustment measures and their outcomes, while identifying possibilities for future interventions that can benefit the people, he said.

In his presentation, Dr. Jones Ofori-Atta noted the average growth rate for Africa in the first half of the 1980s as 0.4 percent. Per-capita income declined by about 2.6 percent per annum between 1980 and 1987. This had resulted in a sharp decline in living standards, which affected mostly vulnerable groups, for example, women, youth, disabled and the aged, he said.

The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the United Nations attempted to grapple with the problem of how to stem the decline in Africa. As a result, programmes such as the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility were developed.

Mr. Kwasi Anyemedu, in a paper on the Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic Policies, said the mining sector has recorded growth in several areas, especially in gold production, which had experienced an increase in output from 282,000 ounces in 1984 to 1,750,000 ounces in 1997. The mineral sector had benefitted from the exchange-rate reforms as minerals are exported, he noted.

On manufacturing, Mr. Anyemadu said this sector passed through two phases under the SAP. From 1984 to 1988, a rapid growth rate of 11.2 percent was realised following liberalisation of imports. However, from 1989 to 1996, the average growth rate was approximately 5.4 percent. This could be attributed to many sources, including inadequate infrastructure, high interest rates and the depreciation of the cedi, he said.

Mr. Anyemedu said employment had decreased in the formal sector but increased in the informal sector. Other areas in the private sector, such as mining and manufacturing, have not proved to be major areas for employment. He suggested that further studies should be done on the gold-mining sector.

“Economic access to food is declining, especially for those who earn their living from agriculture. For urban workers, the minimum wage is the yard stick for economic well being, and economic access to food appears to be worse than in the 1970s.” This was the view of Dr. Wayo Seini of ISSER, University of Ghana.

Dr. Seini state that 36 percent of Ghana’s total population and 46 percent of its rural population are below the poverty line. Using the minimum wage, most of the extreme poor are in the Northern and Upper regions, the Savannah zones and the rural areas.

Dr. Seini suggested some interventions, which included schemes for farmers, steps towards minimizing the risk of production related to climate, intensifying extension education, and promoting agro-processing and diverse sources of income in rural areas to alleviate rural poverty.