

**REPORT ON THE POLICY FORUM ON FAIR GLOBALIZATION IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA
THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LABOUR STUDIES (IILS) &
THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK UNIT (SWOP)
20-21 April 2005
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA**

The forum brought together sixty people including a number of distinguished scholars, policy practitioners and representatives of employers' and workers' organisations of Southern Africa to discuss the problems, prospects, opportunities and strategies for ensuring a 'fair globalisation' in the entire region. We took as our point of departure the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Report: 'A Fair Globalisation, Creating Opportunities for All' of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation. The Commission argued that the social and economic impact of globalisation has been uneven. 'Africa has fared far worse than other regions (of the world). At best Africa felt bypassed, at worst abused and humiliated'.

The aim of the policy Forum was to:

- see globalisation through the eyes of the majority of women and men in Southern Africa;
- identify feasible ways of creating opportunities for fair globalisation in Southern Africa; and
- develop a research agenda and network to facilitate this project.

The programme was developed around two main topics. i) The highlights of the recommendations made by the World Commission; and ii) The prospects and strategies for ensuring a Fair Globalisation in Southern Africa. The first topic was presented by Dr Eddy Lee, Senior Advisor at the IILS and one of the authors of the Report. Dr Andries Bezuidenhout, Researcher at SWOP presented a 27-page response from the standpoint of Southern Africa as a region to the Report. It was argued that our understanding of globalisation has to be grounded in the everyday experiences of people, and has to take into consideration the histories of various localities. The core of the response was a demonstration of the social dimensions of globalisation in the region through extensive statistical data contained in eleven comprehensive tables.

In the context of these social indicators, the SWOP response suggested that the impact of globalisation on the region has been a contradictory process of both "connecting and disconnecting" to the global economy. The formation of the South African Development Community (SADC) is part of a global trend towards greater regional co-operation and integration. Globalisation has accelerated communication within the region, and between the region and the world. However, this penetration of technology is highly uneven. While freer trade has widened consumer choice and introduced cheaper goods for the consumer, the unregulated flow of mass consumer goods into the region is also undermining local industries such as textiles. Globalisation has spread democratic norms and notions of human rights and is encouraging the spread of new workplace norms through the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998 and their campaign to promote 'core' labour standards internationally. Liberalisation of the economy has forced some companies to introduce modern human resource management practices and joint problem solving mechanisms. However, as a limited number of people are being

drawn into a new regional elite, a growing number are losing their jobs and joining the informal sector in a struggle to survive. It is leading to a process of 'disconnection'. The result is that the labour market is segmented into a core of insiders, with some only marginally attached in a semi-periphery or excluded as part of the unemployed periphery.

The Director-General of the ILO's report considered a range of policy realms proposed by the Commission to promote fair globalisation, including the promotion of decent work in global production systems, the dependence of higher levels of employment on growth and investment, the creation of a socio-economic floor, the role of migration, and using core labour standards as instruments to improve working conditions.

The conference participants then broke into five commissions around the policy realms proposed by the ILO. Each commission was introduced by a lead-in discussant – an expert in the policy realm. The commissions sat for one and half hours and then rapporteurs reported back to a Plenary Session of the Forum.

On the second day of the Forum, the discussion focussed on the capacity of the region and nation states to engage with globalisation. The day began with a panel discussion on regionalisation in Southern Africa. Professor Peter Vale, the Nelson Mandela Chair of Political and International Studies at Rhodes University spoke on *The New Regionalism in Southern Africa: An Assessment*. Two trade unionists, Mahlomola Skosana, General Secretary, National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and Maria van Driel, Public Service International (PSI) responded by looking at the *Obstacles and Opportunities of Organising Workers Regionally and Sectorally*.

The conference participants then broke into three commissions to focus on the opportunities and constraints at national level in promoting globalisation. The first commission focused on South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, the second on Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland; and the third on Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique. The commissions then reported to a plenary session of the Forum.

The last session focused on *NEPAD, the African Union (AU) and the Blair Commission on Africa*. Dr Chris Landsberg, Director: Centre for Policy Studies and Professor Jimi Adesina, Department of Sociology, Rhodes University examined the implications of these responses to globalisation in Africa.

In the concluding session two broad responses were identified as emerging in the Forum. The first, what was called "deglobalisation", argued that Africa's marginalisation within the global economy was the result of misguided export-oriented policies and that what was needed was a more inward-looking focus on the domestic economy. The second response accepted that globalisation was fundamentally unfair in the African context, but argued for engagement with the new economy and the need for identifying strategies of mutual benefit. It was suggested that globalisation was a contradictory process that closed down certain policy options, but also opened new opportunities. An example that emerged from the commission on decent work and global production, was the 65,000 jobs that were created in the garment industry in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, creating a manufacturing base for the first time in these countries. To take advantage of this opportunity, you need to

improve the productivity of these workers, improve their labour standards and create reliable information on human resource trends in the region. The Policy Forum provided the social partners, as well as researchers, with an opportunity to shape globalisation through evidence-led research.

In the course of the conference, participants identified the fact that underpinning the ILO Commission was a particular approach to governance, that of social dialogue in which representatives of governments, worker and employer organisations collaborate in the design and implementation of labour market and social policies. This approach assumes that social dialogue leads to a successful integration of countries into the global economy as the process of liberalisation is negotiated between the social partners. It was suggested in discussion that this may well be the case in certain parts of the world but it has yet to be demonstrated in Southern Africa.

We believe that the aims of the policy forum were successfully achieved; representatives from the ten countries of the region were able to engage in open dialogue with each other and experts in the field. In a region where one out of ten jobs are formal sector jobs and many of the core labour rights are yet to be won, many of the recommendations of the Report may seem idealistic. But, it was concluded, the concept of fair globalisation is a goal towards which the region can strive and that this is best done through dialogue between employers, workers and government.

Above all, the Policy Forum presented a challenge to the ILLS and SWOP as research entities to provide the social partners with reliable social and economic information on the challenge of globalisation facing the region. To achieve this objective it was suggested that this Policy Forum could, in co-operation with the ILO Regional Office in Pretoria, become an annual event. A publication consisting of 12 commissioned papers arising out of the Policy Forum will be published later in 2005. We hope this will provide a basis for an ongoing dialogue on Fair Globalisation in Southern Africa.