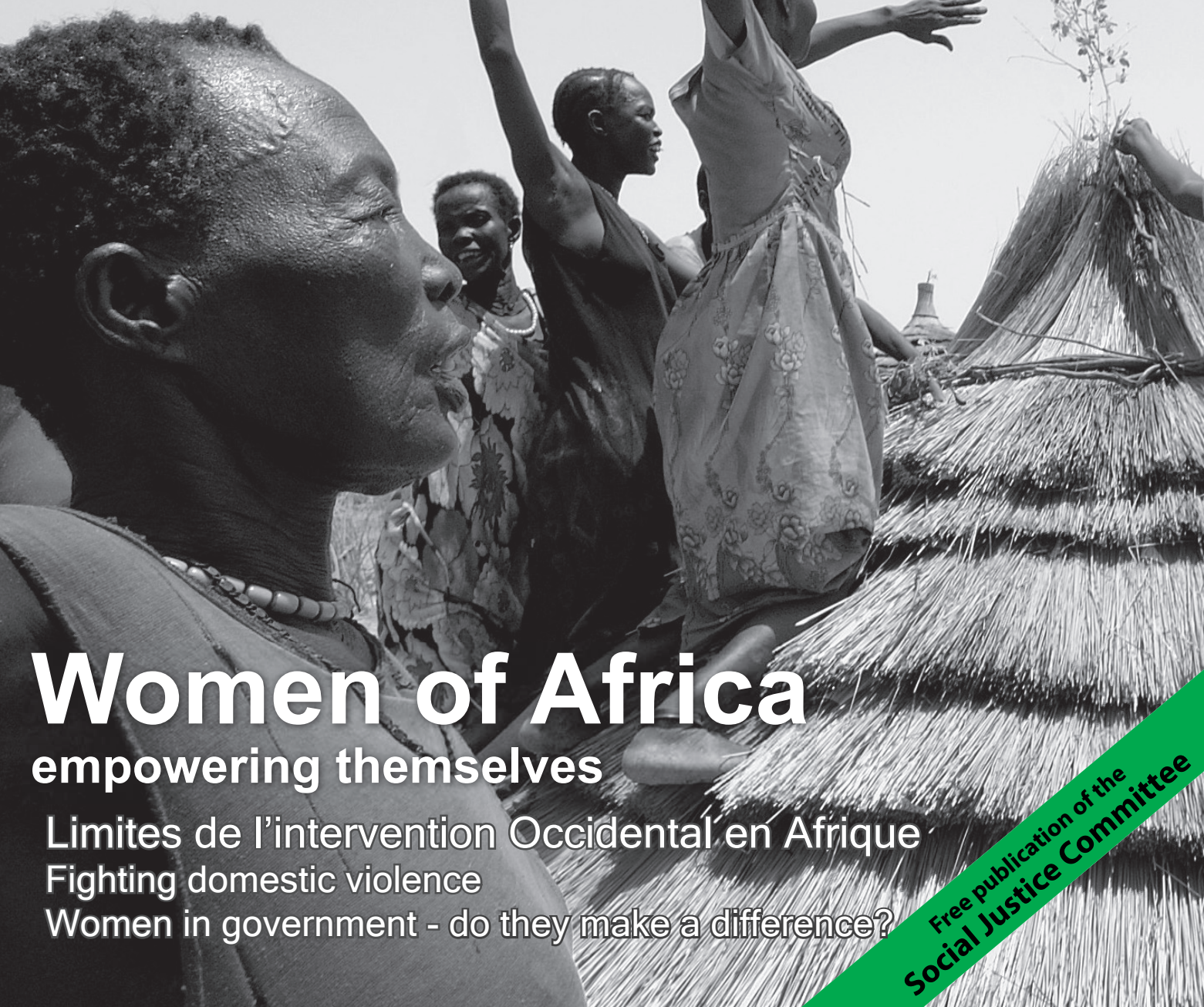


Inside: a recipe for banana bread with a conscience!

March/April 2007 Vol. 21 No.1

The Upstream Journal

***Debt relief at last
for Latin America***



Women of Africa empowering themselves

Limites de l'intervention Occidentale en Afrique

Fighting domestic violence

Women in government - do they make a difference?

Free publication of the
Social Justice Committee

Dear readers,

I've been preparing this issue of the *Upstream Journal* in yet another hectic and wonderfully diverse week at the SJC. The other night was the big performance of our dinner theatre, "Dictatorship of Debt," which turned out to be a stunning display of imagination and talent, from Christopher Columbus as debauched '80s rock star to the IMF as transvestite dominatrix. Just prior to that I was in Washington, going from meetings and workshops on transforming the global economic system, pushing management and the Canadian representatives for better protection of human rights and the empowerment of communities in impoverished countries.

From the artistic to the mundane, this is certainly an interesting place to work.

The last several weeks have been times of change here, as we adjust to Ernie's retirement. I don't mind telling you that had me nervous, but he is keeping his hand in and will keep doing some of the things he enjoys and is good at - his presentations and writing.

And we've been able to hire a new coordinator of education programs, Margo Foster, a young woman of astonishing capacity. She hit the ground running after completing an internship here, and is engaged in all aspects of our outreach.

One of the most exciting things she is working on is a conference next September called "Arriba las Mujeres." We'll bring several women from Central America who are engaged in small scale economic initiatives to talk about the extent to which these are a form of empowerment in their communities. Margo worked with Carol Dolbel, one of our volunteers, to get funding for the event from CIDA, and they are co-organizing it.

With this boost in office capacity, I'm expecting to be able to get the *Upstream Journal* out more frequently. We're getting the next two issues ready now - one that will focus on struggles in Guatemala, long a focus for the SJC, and one that will look into the global trade in small arms.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this issue, which takes a bit more of a positive approach than we sometimes do - naturally enough for a magazine on human rights abuse and poverty! - and explores a few aspects of women's empowerment in Africa.



Derek MacCuish, editor

PS If you haven't done so in a while, take a look at our website. it's constantly evolving, and we hope you'll like the new look and find it's easier to use.

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Donations to the SJC are welcome, and go to support a range of human rights & development education activities. The SJC is a registered charity in Canada, and donations are tax deductible. We accept Visa and MasterCard.

Please consider making a donation and becoming a member. You can use the reply form on the back cover of this *Upstream Journal*, call us (toll free in North America) at 1-877-933-6797 or make a secure on-line donation at the SJC web site www.s-j-c.net

Cover: Women displaced by violence in Sudan's Darfur region put the finishing touches on a thatched roof, celebrating with song and dance as they go, in the Abu Jabra IDP Camp.

© Paul Jeffrey/GlobalAware

Comments on articles can be sent to editor@upstreamjournal.org



Special focus:

Women in Africa - gaining in strength politically, socially, and financially

Kenya

Women fighting violence against women

by Vivien Carli

In Kenya, an estimated 30,000 girls will be raped before they reach twenty years old. Fewer than one in ten will report the case or file a lawsuit.

"Violence against women in Kenya is on the rise," Agnes Leina, program officer for the Coalition On Violence Against Women (COVAW) said in an interview for this article. Even so, she remains optimistic. "People are getting to know that women in pathetic circumstances is not a case of divine intention. It is a situation constructed by the society and can be changed."

The disempowerment of women in Kenya derives from the patriarchal social structure, and the affect high poverty levels have on crime rates, which are rising. Most Kenyan women are illiterate and live below the poverty line, and thus become victims of some form of crime. Their living conditions put them at a disadvantage, with limited decision-making power and restricted access to healthcare and schooling, including access to programs such as agricultural training.

"We want to build the capacity of community-based organizations run by women, in order to respond to violence against women and to work towards ending it," Leina said.

The largest women's coalition group in Kenya, COVAW has gained respect by speaking out and providing legal representation for abused women for more than ten years. It works with grassroots groups, government officials and individual women, although it has struggled to obtain acceptance and recognition by the government.

The coalition coordinates and takes part in various campaigns to change attitudes about violence against women, such as pro-

"People are getting to know that women in pathetic circumstances is not a case of divine intention."



Agnes Leina of COVAW. Photo courtesy Trocaire, Ireland.

viding information to women at legal aid clinics during the annual '16 Days of Activism.' It provides legal assistance to four or five individual victims of violence a month, and encourages women to report cases and seek help and justice.

Women's exposure to violence increases their contact with HIV/AIDS, as more women are becoming infected as a result of sexual assault or coerced sex. Women are frequently blamed for the spread of HIV/AIDS, and stigmatised as promiscuous if they contract the disease. The pandemic has increased gender-based violence in which women are subject to abandonment or shunning by their families and communities, loss of employment, assault and even murder.

Sex workers have been forcibly detained in 'rehabilitation' centres, and trafficked women are subject to medical testing and deportation. As a result, these women may fail to access preventive information, negotiate for safer sex, report cases or end risky relationships.

Leila and the women of COVAW aim to breaking the cycle of violence through capacity building and advocacy. They offer counseling, assist women in legal cases, use public interest litigation to change laws that discriminate against women, and organize sensitization and awareness campaigns. Training sessions have become their main activity, including teaching law enforcement agents how to handle cases of assault on women. They have also set up school programs that teach teachers and students how to respect and uphold women rights.

The silence about violence against women is beginning to break, and women are increasingly reporting

cases of abuse. In a 2003 survey, 52% of Kenyan women reported being sexually abused in their lifetime, with more than 30% reporting an experience of forced sexual intercourse. 2,308 cases of rape were reported in 2003, while 1,653 cases were reported in the first half of 2006.

Groups like COVAW are expanding their awareness campaigns and training sessions on reproductive health, to try to reduce the spread of infections in mothers and children. Activists like Agnes Leila teach women about legal rights and reproductive health, with the hope of socializing the younger generation into a society without violence for women. She describes her vision of her country as one of "a society that is free from all forms of gender-based violence within the domestic, private, public and political institutions," and has come to believe that, despite the current situation of widespread disease and violence, change is coming and improvements are being won in contemporary Kenyan society.

For more information
on COVAW visit
www.covaw.or.ke



Kenyan girls protest violence against women. Photo courtesy COVAW

Social Justice Committee Annual General Meeting

15 May 18:00

Members are invited to come hear about programs of the past year and plans for the future, and to elect the SJC Board of Directors for the coming year. Nominations to the Board are now being accepted.

(Nominations to be from any five members, with the written consent of the nominee, and provided to the SJC office at least one week prior to the AGM).

SJC members will also consider amendments to the organization's by-laws, and the financial report from last year will be presented.

Food provided
(free, donations welcome)

St. Patrick's Congress Hall
454 René Lévesque West
Montreal

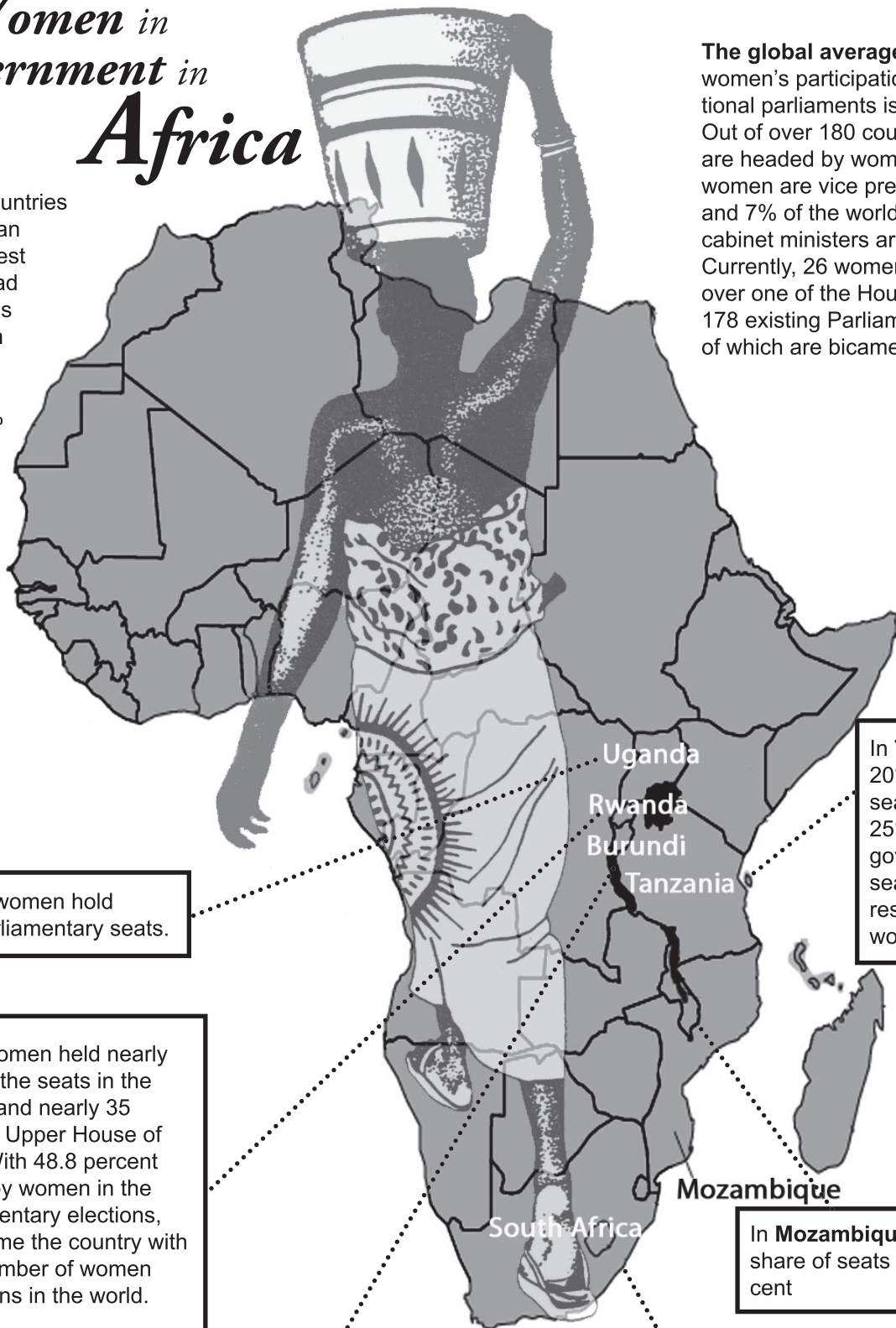
Info: 514-933-6797

Women in government in Africa

13 developing countries in the sub-Saharan region - the poorest area on Earth - had higher proportions of women MPs in government. As a whole, African women hold 10% of Parliamentary seats and the highest numbers are in East Africa with a little over 13% (Mozambique and Rwanda being the highest in the region and continent).

(source: UNIFEM)

The global average for women's participation in national parliaments is of 16%. Out of over 180 countries, 14 are headed by women, six women are vice presidents, and 7% of the world's total cabinet ministers are women. Currently, 26 women preside over one of the Houses of the 178 existing Parliaments, 64 of which are bicameral.



In **Uganda**, women hold 24.7% of parliamentary seats.

In **Rwanda**, women held nearly 50 per cent of the seats in the Lower House and nearly 35 per cent in the Upper House of Parliament. With 48.8 percent of seats won by women in the recent parliamentary elections, Rwanda became the country with the highest number of women parliamentarians in the world.

Burundi included a quota of 30 per cent for women's political representation

In **Tanzania**, 20% of national seats and 25% of local government seats are reserved for women.

In **Mozambique**, women's share of seats is 30 per cent

In **South Africa**, a municipal act states that political parties must ensure women comprise 30% of lists submitted for local-level elections.



Nigeria's former finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,

Women in political power - do they make a difference?

By Celia D'Andrea

Women in Africa are taking on new leadership positions in politics. While most of these female politicians are using their role to help in the advancement of women, some are criticized for ignoring issues concerning gender discrimination and women's rights.

"What we need are women who will use their leadership positions to liberate themselves, and other women," Everjoice Win, ActionAid's International Women's Rights Coordinator, wrote in New Zimbabwe.

"Trading on their biology alone is not good enough. I am angry with these kinds of women who at every other time in their lives forget they are one of us, only to remember their vaginas when it suits them."

Four notable female leaders are changing the image of African politics:

- Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf,
- Zimbabwe's Vice-President Joyce Mujuru,
- Nigeria's former finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and
- Uganda's former Vice President Specioza Kazibwe.

Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, nicknamed "The Iron Lady," is Africa's first elected female president. Before her rise to the head of state, Johnson-Sirleaf was imprisoned in the 1980s

for criticizing Samuel Doe's military regime, and was later charged with treason after he became president.

During her campaign, Johnson-Sirleaf pledged that if she won, it would inspire other women to compete for superior political positions. Yet, in the rural areas where male-dominated traditions prevail, many men are sceptical about having a woman lead their country.

Even so, she has already put women's rights at the center of her political agenda by focusing on education,

"Trading on their biology alone is not good enough. I am angry with these kinds of women who at every other time in their lives forget they are one of us."

job creation and fiscal management, according to Aili Mari Tripp, academic and author of numerous books including "Women and Politics in Uganda," who was interviewed for this article.

Johnson-Sirleaf launched the National Girls Education Policy to provide girls with equal access to education, and is asking women around the world to contribute to the "Sirleaf Market Women's Fund."

Tripp believes that although Johnson-Sirleaf's presidency will influence other

countries to elect a woman as president, and women have begun running for presidency in significant numbers.

"Women are forming and heading political parties. It is just a matter of time," Tripp said.

However, although women have achieved political status through their positions, yet not all of them have brought women's issues to the forefront.

Zimbabwean Vice President Joyce Mujuru became the country's first female cabinet member in 1980, even though she was semi-literate. She is criticized as being a puppet for her husband, a former commander-in-chief of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and President Mugabe.

Mujuru has yet to speak of women's issues in a public forum, and her critics argue that if she were to become president, she would ignore issues concerning gender inequality and women's rights.

Often described as "tough" and "down to earth," she was nicknamed Teurai Ropa or "Spill Blood" when she shot down a helicopter using a machine gun from an injured soldier. In 1998, Mujuru was one of the officials accused of looting the Zimbabwe War Victims Compensation Fund. She and her husband live on a 3,500-acre farm that the country's Supreme Court found to have been illegally requisitioned from the owner.

Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was

declared Time Magazine's "Hero of the Year" in 2004. A former finance minister, she was then Foreign Minister until her resignation in August, 2006.

One of her goals was to transform the image of Nigeria, considered to be the second most corrupt country in the world, saying that the image of Nigerians is being smeared by the small percentage of scam artists that are often the focus of attention. Okonjo-Iweala also focused on ensuring that Nigeria's oil money goes towards roads, schools and health care, and not to a elite minority.

Okonjo-Iweala argued that her gender helped in fighting to reform Nigeria's economy.

"She spoke of the boost her position gave to women and saw that she brought important qualities to the job as a woman," Tripp said.

Uganda's Specioza Kazibwe was Vice President from 1994 to 2003, becoming Africa's first female Vice President. When Kazibwe left her husband because he abused her and fathered children with another woman, it caused a stir around the country because these acts are seen as common.

In 2003, she stepped down from her position to go to Harvard and study medicine, but critics claimed that she left because it was too difficult to deal with both her position and the controversial divorce. The women's movement rallied behind Kazibwe, how-

ever, because she had spoken publicly about issues concerning spousal abuse, polygamy and how changes should initially be made in the household.

Even so, Kazibwe is not seen as being supportive of women's issues.

"I do not think her appointment as minister of women and as vice-president reflects well on President Museveni's commitment to women's rights, which has only gone as far as it has suited his political agenda," Tripp said. She points out that Kazibwe did not come out of the women's movement, but was appointed to appease Catholics and people from her home region in the eastern part of the country.

Although she founded the African Women Committee on Peace and Development in 1998, she opposed reform of the Land Act. The women's movement sought to add a co-ownership amendment to the Act, which allowed that when a woman's husband died, his land went to his family and not to his wife. Kazibwe was vigorously against the reform, saying that women merely needed access and not control of her husband's land.

"The added benefit of her being a woman was a crumb to the women's movement," Tripp said. "She was not known for being a strong advocate for women's rights. Her openness about being abused by her husband was an indication of how far Ugandan women had come in pushing open a space to raise issues like violence against women. On the other hand, her position on other key women's concerns left a lot to be desired."

As this review of four individuals shows, a woman may be in a position of political power and not necessarily have gender as the central focus of her political agenda. While Johnson-Sirleaf and Okonjo-Iweala emphasize the importance of women, almost the opposite can be said of Mujuru and Kazibwe. Even so, despite the mixed results, what is evident is the increasing role of women in African politics today.

Get involved - Join our team of inspiring volunteers!

The SJC is looking for a person with experience in bookkeeping to assist with office accounting. Keeping our accounts healthy and up-to-date ensures that the SJC can maximize every donated dollar.

The SJC is seeking people with experience with web design (Dreamweaver), and graphic design (Photoshop, Illustrator) to contribute to the SJC website. Put your tech knowledge to work for a good cause! We also welcome graphic design folks for posters, Upstream illustration etc

The Upstream Journal is seeking writers for upcoming issues, including one on the trade in small arms. Please contact the editor, Derek, at editor@upstreamjournal.org for more information on how you can contribute to the Upstream's dialogue on human rights.

The SJC has more volunteers and interns than ever but the number of computer workstations limits our capacity. If you have a well-functioning computer (not too old) that you would like to donate - or work for a company that could provide systems at a reduced rate - please contact the SJC at (514) 933-6797.



Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

Keep up to date with SJC news and bulletins on human rights abuse (and what you can do about it).

It's easy to sign up through our new on-line system.

Visit www.s-j-c.net

*mmmm...
taste the ju*

The Recipe

1/2 c. butter, room temp.
1 c. sugar
3 eggs, beaten
3 c. flour
1 c. organic mashed bananas
1 c. chocolate chips (fair trade chocolate bar broken into small pieces)
2/3 c. buttermilk
1 1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Cream butter then add sugar, beating until light and fluffy. Add beaten eggs then all other ingredients. Stir until just blended. Pour batter in 2 greased bread pans (7x4x2 inch). Bake at 325 degrees about one hour.

Sugar, bananas, and cocoa are all products imported from poorer countries, with harmful and inequitable effects on humans and the environment. How then, can we make socially conscious chocolate chip banana

BANANAS

The fourth most important crop in world food production, and the single most profitable product for most grocery stores. In recent years, large banana-exporting companies such as Dole, Del Monte and Chiquita have cut jobs, wages, and benefits, and closed plantations in the Caribbean. Latin America grows 83% of bananas for export. Workers in Ecuador, the world's largest banana exporter, are paid less than \$2 a day, but cannot form unions. These conditions have led to a rise in poverty, unemployment, crime, and incidents of armed attack on workers.

Fair-trade bananas have not yet been certified in Canada as they have in Europe and the U.S. In the meantime, organic bananas are a socially and environmentally conscious choice. Organic bananas are harvested under standards that aim to reduce the environmentally harmful use of 280 different pesticides, toxic chemicals, and intensive farming methods. Organic banana production discourages monoculture and genetic uniformity, reducing resistant pests and diseases, soil erosion, water pollution, deforestation, and land contamination.

Learn More

- about fair trade: www.OxfamFairTrade.org
- about fair trade products near you: www.OxfamFairTrade.org

Justice!

by Caroline Foster and Vivien Carli

SUGAR

One of the most profitable industries in the world. Historically, this industry has been marked by slavery and worker exploitation, and continues to operate under inequitable and hazardous working conditions in non-industrialized countries.

Among other developing countries, Mozambique's sugar cane production has been crippled by European subsidies for sugar production. This situation allows European sugar to be sold profitably at low prices, while making it extremely difficult for developing countries to compete in international and even home markets. Furthermore, the raw sugar exported by developing countries is bought at a fraction of the price of refined sugar, allowing rich countries to absorb yet more of the sugar industry profit. For local industries and farmers, the result is catastrophic

Fair trade sugar helps build up communities in poor countries by restoring a fair price to farmers in an inequitable industry. While the conventional price paid to local producers is about US\$68 per metric ton, the fair trade price of \$520 provides a better living wage

CHOCOLATE (COCOA)

A US\$13 billion industry, in which two-thirds of the U.S. chocolate candy market is owned by Hershey's and M&M/MARS. The Ivory Coast the world's largest producer, provides 43% of the world's cocoa, and Ghana's cocoa industry employs two million farmers, but cocoa production is exploitative, marked by low wages and child labour.

Fair trade cocoa comes from Belize, Bolivia, Cameroon, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, Nicaragua, and Peru. Global Exchange is one of several fair trade organizations asking the U.S. chocolate industry to adopt fair trade standards that would guarantee that farmers receive a fair minimum price that allows families to have sufficient income for their needs. Moreover, fair trade refuses to support conventional cocoa farming practice that uses children to carry out tasks with machetes and pesticides, and without protective equipment.

FairTrade.ca and www.maketrade4fair.com
or: www.equita.qc.ca

Deux Africaines et leur point de vue sur les limites de l'intervention Occidentale en Afrique

Binta Sarr présidente de APROFES explique les lacunes des ONG Occidentales au niveau de la sensibilisation de la société civile et de l'émancipation des femmes. Georgine Djeutane Kengne, économiste camerounaise, explique comment les programmes de développement des institutions internationales ne prennent pas pour compte les réalités socio-économique et politique des pays africains.

Par Maude Henry

Binta Sarr, Sénégal

Binta Sarr est présidente de l'Association pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise (APROFES), une association qui travaille pour l'émancipation des femmes sénégalaises. Précisément, l'association œuvre pour que les femmes sénégalaises prennent conscience de leurs droits et sachent les défendre. L'association agit au niveau de la communauté, des syndicats, et des collectivités locales. Elle forme des éducatrices d'alphabétisation, enseigne aux femmes des techniques de production, organise des centres d'écoute pour prévenir la violence faite aux femmes et gère un dispositif de micro crédit.



Les femmes africaines et les femmes occidentales partagent la nécessité de se battre pour l'égalité des sexes; pour l'accès à la terre, aux ressources, et aux instances décisionnelles. Au Sénégal, la marche vers la parité est bien avancée au niveau institutionnel. Le pays a ratifié toutes les conventions concernant l'égalité des sexes. Toutefois, en pratique, ces textes ne sont pas nécessairement respectés. Mme Sarr affirme que cette tendance est entrain de s'améliorer mais qu'il existe toujours des disparités présentes au sein du pays.

APROFES est aussi déterminante sur le plan de la sensibilisation. En ef-

fet, une loi écrite peut exister mais ne sert à rien si elle n'est pas connue. Ainsi, APROFES enseigne aux femmes, en langues locales, quelles sont les lois qui les affectent, particulièrement celles du Code de la famille, permettant ainsi aux analphabètes de connaître leurs droits.

Avec grand regret, Mme Sarr constate l'existence d'un faible nombre d'ONG qui s'efforcent à changer les mentalités sexistes persistantes et que les ONG occidentales orientent plutôt leurs projets vers les domaines de la santé, de l'économie et des lois afin

*«Il faut
comprendre la lutte
de la société civile
dans le sens où ces
pays ne demandent
pas la charité.»*

d'obtenir des résultats quantitatifs.

Or, un pays peut bien avoir tous les atouts quantitatifs nécessaires pour améliorer le bien être de sa population, mais si celle-ci n'est pas sensibilisée à l'évolution qu'on lui propose, le développement humain n'est pas possible.

Le mécanisme présentement en place favorise les ONG occidentales, et celles-ci négligent les aspects qualitatifs du développement. On trouve en effet peu de projets pour la simple sen-

sibilisation des consciences. Binta Sarr déplore les conséquences de la professionnalisation des ONG qui agissent par appels d'offre comme le feraient des entreprises. Elle aimerait que les ONG africaines acquièrent davantage de pouvoir pour développer leurs propres programmes, en accord avec l'identité, les valeurs et les objectifs propres à la population Sénégalaise.

Georgine Djeutane Kengue, Kenya

Georgine Djeutane Kengne est une économiste camerounaise vivant actuellement à Nairobi au Kenya. Elle milite avec The World Student Christian Fédération pour la justice économique, notamment pour l'abolition de la dette des pays du Sud et pour l'abandon des conditions des programmes d'ajustements structurels.



Concernant les aides occidentales, comme Georgine Djeutane Kengne explique, «Il faut comprendre la lutte de la société civile dans le sens où ces pays ne demandent pas la charité. Les ressources mondiales et les besoins occidentaux en matières premières sont depuis longtemps drainés de l'Afrique vers le Nord. Depuis plusieurs décennies il y a un échange inégal et la dette a déjà été payée plus de deux fois à travers les services de la dette.» Ainsi, elle affirme que les ressources déboursées par les États du Sud dans le but du

paiement de la dette extérieure doivent rester à l'intérieur des frontières territoriales et servir à équiper et à développer les pays.

D'autre part, selon Georgine Djeutane Kengne les programmes d'ajustements structurels s'apparentent à une stratégie des pays du Nord, dont le modèle économique de référence est en décalage complet avec celui des pays du Sud.

«Les programmes d'ajustements structurels ont contribué à accrocher l'économie des pays du Sud à la mondialisation. Maintenant ils dépendent du marché global. Tout a été privatisé, l'eau, l'énergie...» dit-elle. Ils ont concouru à maintenir les pays du Sud à la remorque de l'économie des pays du Nord.

La société civile du Sud est donc en droit de penser que les programmes d'ajustements structurels participent à un néocolonialisme occidental et à un système d'exploitation mis en place par le Nord, qui se perpétue de génération en génération.

Georgine Djeutane Kengne pense que les choses pourraient d'ailleurs aller mieux si les pays du Nord se désengageaient des affaires des pays du Sud. Les états y gagneraient sur les plans économique et politique. Au niveau économique, elle pense que les privatisations pourraient être conduites de manière plus équitable. «La course vers le profit fait qu'à la fin du mois, on va payer plus cher l'énergie que l'on n'a même pas consommée» dit elle.

Au niveau politique, les états africains gagneraient en crédibilité. En effet, dans le système actuel «les états n'ont plus la parole car les citoyens votent pour un candidat qui finalement n'a pas son mot à dire dans beaucoup de domaines. Un homme politique peut être élu avec n'importe quel programme, mais il ne sera en mesure de l'appliquer une fois au pouvoir car les pays du G8, la Banque Mondiale, et l'OMC lui dictent vers quoi et comment il doit diriger son pays».

“Once you have empowered women, you have empowered the society and you’ve empowered your country.”

- Chengetai Madziwa, Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa

By Christine Hadekel

In the Murewa district of rural Zimbabwe, women now hold three out of twenty-six leadership positions in Murewa's villages. Traditionally, chiefs and village heads are men, while women are at a lower level relative to their fathers, husbands, and sons. In a society where gender-biased laws and male-dominated traditions effectively deny women land tenure and ownership, having these three acknowledged as head of villages is a success.

Chengetai Madziwa, who works with the Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa, considers the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 as a catalyst for the women's movement in Zimbabwe. The few women from Zimbabwe who went came back with a commitment to improve gender issues at home.

As a result of their increased engagement, Zimbabwe signed an agreement that reserved 30 percent of parliamentary seats for women, although this commitment has yet to be fulfilled. Women won only 13 percent of seats won in the last election.

Zimbabwe's vice-president is female but, as Madziwa put it in an interview for this article, “her appointment is more ad-hoc than systematic. It is simply a token attempt to appease the women's movement.”

In June 2006 Zimbabwe passed a domestic violence bill, considered a solid step forward, but Madziwa is concerned that, to be effective, the law must be well known and accepted. “The government first must empower women to know there is a law that protects them,” she

said. “Domestic violence and abuse of women has always been accepted as a part of Zimbabwe's patriarchal culture, and the majority of women in Zimbabwe don't know there is now a law that protects them, especially in impoverished rural areas. Women say, if my husband beats me, and I report him to the police, he will go to prison. But he is the breadwinner, so if he is gone, what am I going to eat? Who's going to take care of my kids?”

The Human Rights Trust, like other African NGOs, approaches women's rights by talking about the things that affect everyday life - the rights of children, the right to food, the right to health, the right to education for children, the right to shelter, the right to seek employment. The right in their home to say they are not supposed to be battered.

Madziwa believes that once the women have absorbed that discussion of human rights, they will start to ask why their government doesn't protect these rights.

“For me, empowerment is through human rights training programmes, awareness-raising about their rights, and income generating opportunities,” she says. “Once you have empowered women, you have empowered the society and you've empowered your country, because you need women in development. Don't sideline us. Let women be heard.”

The Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa works to mainstream human rights, democracy and good governance in public institutions; advocacy training; and to foster a culture that promotes and protects human rights through community based initiatives; visit www.sahrit.org

The Kenana Knitters of Kenya—women opting for independence

by Vivien Carli

Mary Wairimu has been working with the women's group, Kenana Knitters, in the farming community of Njoro, Kenya for more than seven years.

"Kenana Knitters gives me options and choices to gain some independence and supplement the family income, these are opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to me," she says.

Ms. Wairimu lives independently and owns a house, an example of how women are helping each other through the growing presence of women's cooperatives in Africa. In Njoro, cooperatives offer inexpensive and flex-



ible income-earning activities, along with health services and information sessions on reproductive health.

Founded by Patricia Nightingale in 1998, Kenana Knitters now has 220 members, mainly women. Ms. Nightingale's initial goal was to find markets for yarn from spinners left without work when a local spinning and weaving workshop closed down. She rejuvenated the market and diversi-

fied products, starting with a range of knitted toys.

The cooperative generates income by supporting local wool producers and by knitting the wool into marketable products.

Ms. Nightingale buys the locally spun wool, which is then knitted into toys, bedding, scarves, hats, sweaters and socks, and sold in Kenya, United States, Canada, England and Scotland.

"Most women are traditionally 'under the thumb' of men. Their thoughts and ideas are not regarded as valid," Kenana Knitters' managing director Sarah Johnstone said in an interview for this article. "Their clothes, behaviour and ideals are largely dictated by their husbands, while their wages are used to pay school fees, uniform costs, food bills, etc., those of their husbands finances their socializing."

Njoro women, like most Kenyan women, have very little time for themselves and little independence outside of the home. They are overloaded with daily duties - carrying out agricultural work, tending to their children, parents and in-laws, cooking, collecting water and cleaning.

Men perform most of the agricultural wage work, controlling the family's earnings and the private and public decision-making. However, since agricultural wages are insufficient for supporting extended families in terms of medical bills, food and education for the children, living standards remain low.

Kenana Knitters, like several of Kenya's women's groups, is altering traditional Kenyan gender roles.

"Small pockets of our community are experiencing change and,



for good or bad," Johnstone said. "Some of our women are realizing that life can improve without the need of a husband or partner."

Kenana Knitters offers an income earning activity that is flexible and easily adapted to the women's lifestyle. It can be carried out when time permits and does not bring additional stress onto the woman's daily tasks.

They can work at home, or bring their children to the workplace, where they will receive a free lunch. Equipment is cheap and easily accessible, and the group uses traditional plants as colour dyes. During the rainy and drought seasons, knitting is an extra source of income for the families, helping to ease the costs of health care and



food brought by disease and drought.

Kenana Knitters offers services to reduce the impacts of poverty and improve the well-being of its members.

It supplies workers with free access to health clinics providing treatment and information on HIV/AIDS, homeopathy and family planning. Teams of teachers and trainers bring educational and health services to numerous communities, and run outreach programs about women's rights, HIV/AIDS and violence.

"Improved health can build the capacity of its members, increase women's motivation and ability to work and earn independently, therefore increasing their self-esteem and advancing their participation in decision-making over sexual relations and income spending," Johnstone said.

Kenana Knitters' activities highlight the importance of family life and the community. In a letter to her members, Ms. Nightingale wrote that "I feel very strongly about the family unit, extended families and family life, therefore, the whole point of the group is to improve the well-being of the families concerned."

She emphasizes that a woman's role is essential in upholding the family structure and the community at large. Therefore, the group's goal is multifunctional, providing women with access to income in order to help them enhance the welfare of their families, achieve a balance of power in the household, and gain independence and self-empowerment.

The group has been well received in the community, and reflects the rising influence of women's co-operatives in Africa. These groups place women at the forefront in the struggle for equality and autonomy, responding to the marginalization of women and poor living conditions by raising living conditions while making gains in the fight against human rights abuse.

For more information visit:

www.kenanaknitters.com

In the Montreal area, products can be purchased at Folklore, 4879 Sherbrooke Ouest, Westmount, QC
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Recent info from Pambazuka News included these listings:

More Funding Needed to Help Victims of Sexual Violence

Doctors and social service providers from countries affected by conflict today called for greater resources to support women and children suffering from sexual violence. In heart-wrenching testimonies, they highlighted the long-term consequences of such violence, which they said required medical, social, legal and psychological services to help victims regain control of their lives.

www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=816

Swaziland: Old Habits Die Hard

A new constitution has granted Swazi women a degree of protection that is shocking tradition-bound Swazi men as an education campaign tours the conservative kingdom outlining those hard-won rights. "The rights of HIV-positive women, inheritance issues for unwed couples, child maintenance and domestic violence - all these new issues for Swazis are addressed in law. The traditional family structure cannot cope with these," said Sibonlo Mdluli, one of a team of eight lawyers addressing community meetings across the country. www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54366

Uganda: Women's Representation in Politics

What is the position of women in politics in Uganda? The authors argue that the mode of electing women to parliament, and the interpretation of the reserved seats, has also meant that women representatives have found it difficult to challenge the government in controversial matters.

www.eldis.org/cf/search/disp/docdisplay.cfm?doc=DOC20771&resource=f1

Zimbabwe: Women Hail Domestic Violence Bill

Women's organisations have hailed the Domestic Violence Bill, saying the proposed law would help curb domestic violence that has resulted in deaths or serious injuries to many people in the country. Musasa Project director Ms Ednah Bhala said the provisions of the Bill were comprehensive enough to deal with domestic violence. www.herald.co.zw

Gender and Media Handbook – Promoting Equality, Diversity & Empowerment

This handbook aims to help journalists and media professionals internationally to be sensitive to gender issues such as negative portrayals of women in the media, the lack of women in leadership positions in media organisations, etc., and to provide practical help for people who want to see things change. www.comminit.com/materials/ma2006/materials-2905.html



Countries of Latin America finally to get debt relief too – but at a cost

International agencies like the World Bank and IMF dodged their responsibility to cancel the debts of impoverished countries for years, but neither has been as reluctant as has the Inter American Development Bank. Rather than keep pace with the rest of the world and finally commit to 100% debt relief, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) spent the better part of the past two years “analyzing the implications of different options that could lead to a proposal.”

The World Bank and IMF fought off calls to cancel the debt for years, until the G8 group of wealthy countries finally agreed that international financial institutions needed to join creditor countries and give the full cancellation. And so, in 2006, some countries in Africa finally got the debt relief for which they were waiting for more than ten years.

The IDB is a large creditor for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) of Honduras, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Guyana. These countries pay 60% of their debts to the IDB. The poorest country in South America, Bolivia, owes the IDB US\$1.6 billion and pays it more than \$100 million a year.

The debts of Bolivia, Honduras, Guyana, Haiti and Nicaragua come to US\$3.5 billion, and the delay in debt relief comes from the perception that

its “cost” will have to be covered somehow. These five countries are expected to pay US\$322 million to the IDB this year, \$111 million of it interest charges. Cancelling the debt would reduce the IDB’s profit (\$762 million last year – down from \$2.4 billion two years ago) but would not even require dipping into the \$14 billion the IDB has set aside for a rainy day. Even so, an agreement on cancellation was delayed as Brazil and the US disagreed about this “cost.” Brazil wanted the US to pay it; the US wanted the IDB to take the debt write-off itself.

Desperately in need of development funds, these impoverished countries have better uses for the almost million dollars a day they are supposed to give the IDB. More than 3 million Bolivians live in absolute poverty. Last year their government spent \$38 per person on health care, and \$39 per person on debt service.

So it is good news that the IDB is finally agreeing on a program that will cancel debts incurred before the end of 2004. It is also good news that Haiti will begin receiving some degree of debt relief, although it is unclear how much, and how long the country will be required to comply with IMF-designed economic restructuring. (Ecuador, where 40% of people live on less than \$2 a day, remains outside the

program. Ecuador is scheduled to pay more than US\$200 million to the IDB this year, more than the amount it gets in foreign aid.)

The IMF is covering debts of the most impoverished countries with its own resources, with rich countries kicking in to a fund for the less-severe cases. It cancelled the debts of eighteen HIPC countries in January, and the World Bank followed suit in July. Cancelled World Bank debt is being paid by contributions from rich countries and by transfers of funds from its main operation, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which makes almost US\$2 billion profit a year.

By contrast, the IDB is planning to offset the “cost” of debt relief by cancelling a substantial amount of lending for future development, including projects that have already been approved. This will affect US\$210 million in development lending; Guyana’s development program will be hit the hardest.

Most debt cancellation advocates agree that the resources that are freed up after debt relief are preferred to loans from Washington-based organizations with their conservative market-driven economic reform conditions. So the debt relief is welcome. Even so, it is unclear what the loss of future resources will mean to these countries’ development paths. - *Derek MacCuish*



Reflecting on successes

After more than thirty years, my tenure as a staff person at the SJC has come to an end even though I plan to remain involved with it. (I think that means I will continue to write this column for some time yet.) I guess this time with the SJC gives me permission to reminisce a bit.

In some respects, those exciting days when the SJC was born in 1975 seem so very long ago. In other ways, they seem like yesterday. I remember well the three talks that launched the SJC – John Dillon from GATT-FLY, the High Commissioner of Tanzania and, representing the Canadian government, Gerard Pelletier; all focusing on global hunger but each from his own perspective. Out of those talks, came the dozen or so of us who decided that an organization such as the SJC was needed.

A few days before my farewell party, Nadya, an intern from France, asked me to name what I consider to be some of the highlights of the past thirty-two years. Her question made me think, but here in chronological order, are a few of what I believe to be some of our notable accomplishments.

Strangely enough, the first had nothing to do with “developing” countries unless we include the Canadian North in that category. It was the campaign against the Mackenzie Valley (gas) pipeline. POP (People or Pipeline) was the name of the coalition we both formed and marched under around Place Ville Marie, the Montreal home of Imperial Oil. In what was to become a custom of ours, my brother Paul produced the drawings for a “Pipeline kit” and we hit the campaign trail, visiting churches and schools and anyone else who would listen to us. The government appointed the Berger Inquiry and finally listened to the Dene and Inuit and groups like us from across the country and, lo and behold, canceled the project. Our first victory.

Several years later, we found ourselves working on Central America, particularly Guatemala and El Salvador. We joined with a number of other Montrealers in forming COTRAC which took up the cause of Salvadoran refugees in Honduras. Barbara Zerter, our staff person, took a leave of absence to work in the camps at Mesa Grande and Colomoncagua. Others of us visited the camps frequently and became a voice for the refugees who said that, when the time came, they wanted to return home to El Salvador together. And they did, accompanied by a few of us. Another success.

Around 1990 we embarked on our campaign to eliminate the foreign debt of impoverished countries and we came up with our most successful tool by far – WOW (Who owes who) or La dette: combien des fois payees? I don’t believe I am exaggerating when I say that we have used that presentation about 400 times and continue to use it today. Once again, working with others, we put enough pressure on our government and the World Bank to bring about cancellation of debts. Not exactly as we wanted, but close enough to say that we have been successful to date.

These are but a few of the highlights of our existence. We could include the Upstream Journal which has certainly evolved from the News Notes we first published, the conferences on debt or Mexico that we sponsored, the exposure trips to Central America, the meetings with government officials, the many presentations we have given, and so on.

Perhaps one of our greatest accomplishments is that we are still around. For our first fifteen years or so, we, like many Canadian international NGOs, relied very much on federal government grants. In the early nineties, the government abruptly withdrew funding from organizations that did not have projects overseas. As a result, many failed. We ourselves faltered but thanks to the generosity of our staff and members, we pulled through and are still here today, perhaps even stronger than ever. Help from the Government of Quebec is appreciated too.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all our members, staff, volunteers and supporters, past and present. It is you who have made the Social Justice Committee what it is today. It has been a truly wonderful experience working with you.

It is good to learn from the past but we cannot dwell on it. Unfortunately, we still face many examples of systematic injustices on a global scale, perhaps even more than we did in 1975.

Our rapidly deteriorating natural environment will also bring us new challenges as people and countries struggle over water and other natural resources. Clearly, our work has just begun.

Ernie Schibli is a founding member of the SJC.
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The Social Justice Committee
Le Comité pour la justice sociale

The Social Justice Committee of Montreal has been working to raise awareness of the root causes of hunger, poverty and repression in the world through our education programs since 1975. We work in solidarity with organizations in a number of Third World countries in the search for a more just and sustainable global socio-economic system.

The Social Justice Committee depends on financial support from its members and the general public. It is a registered charitable organization; donations are tax deductible.

We invite you to donate today, and become a member by supporting the mission of the Social Justice Committee to:

- Analyze the underlying structural and global causes of poverty, human rights violations and other social injustices.
- Contribute to informed popular participation in eliminating these injustices.
- *Work in solidarity to transform our world into a just society.*

The Social Justice Committee believes that social and economic change is essential for the creation of a sustainable world, and that each person has the right and the responsibility to participate in the process.

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The **Upstream Journal** is published by the **Social Justice Committee, Montreal**. The Upstream Journal focuses on economic, social and cultural rights, reflecting the SJC perspective of Third World poverty as a human rights issue.

Subscription to the Upstream Journal is by donation, which goes to support a range of SJC educational projects. The journal is published five times a year, at irregular intervals between September and June.

Views expressed in the Upstream Journal are the writers' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Social Justice Committee. We welcome the submission of illustrations and articles on aspects of international development and human rights.

Le Comité pour la justice sociale remercie le **ministère des Relations internationales** de son appui à sa mission d'éducation à la solidarité internationale.

The Social Justice Committee thanks the **Québec Ministry of International Relations** for its support of our mission of education on behalf of international solidarity.

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