

Foreword to REPOA's 2003 Annual Report

Chairperson's Statement

Professor Esther D. Mwaikambo

In November 2004 REPOA will be celebrating its tenth anniversary. During the last nine years we have seen significant changes in an organisation that started as a research programme in November 1994. As a result of increased demand for its services, REPOA has grown and transformed rapidly, especially during the last four years. Its transformation has taken two forms. Firstly, the content of the programme has been diversified/extended from the original focus on research capacity building to include explicit focus on policy dialogue and development. Secondly, deliberate decisions and actions were implemented to transform the research programme into an organization with a defined structure and rules of the game. Its physical infrastructure (offices, library, conference, computers, etc.) has grown and staff has expanded, despite the official policy to maintain a small secretariat (for facilitating networking).

The demand for REPOA services reflects appreciation for the work that has been built around capacity strengthening, society relevance and quality output. In a country with high levels of vulnerability and poverty, REPOA continues to occupy a unique position in the fight against the two enemies of development. In this position REPOA has four responsibilities: (i) capacity building of researchers and research users, (ii) production of knowledge to inform policy and decision making, (iii) promotion of dialogue to facilitate participatory/consultative policy development and decision making, (iv) cooperation and partnership with other stakeholders in developing policies and strategies for fighting vulnerability and poverty in the country. During the last four years these responsibilities have been undertaken within the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

Much of the details on the performance of this work in relation to the objectives of REPOA are reflected in the various internal and external reviews and evaluations that were carried out in 1997, 2002 and 2004.

December 2004 also marks the end of Phase Two that commenced in January 2000. Therefore, the plan of activities for 2004 will not only include finalising the Second Phase, but will also aim at laying the groundwork for a smooth transition to the Third Phase.

As REPOA moves to the Third Phase (2005-2009) it has to address the challenge of increased responsibilities and expectations of the various stakeholders. I have outlined some of them above. As a priority REPOA needs to develop a strategy for the continued strengthening and maintenance of its own capacity. For some time we will continue to rely on the support of donors. However, as we all know, donor policies differ and they may also change with time. Therefore, a related challenge is to develop a medium term strategy for support from donors that promotes both the organisation's autonomy and sustainability. In the long run a strategy that relies on internal financing will have to be developed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our collaborators who have extended critical support to REPOA over the years. In this context I would like to express special thanks to The Royal Netherlands Government and the British Government for their generous core support in facilitating the operations of this organisation. I would also like to thank the United Republic of Tanzania, DANIDA, NORAD, UNDP and UNICEF for their project related institutional support. It is my sincere hope that, as we continue to evolve and adapt ourselves to carrying out the work that started nine years ago, we shall also continue to receive the highly needed support from all our collaborators.