

ACAS Puts Health on its Agenda

Meredeth Turshen (Rutgers University)

At the 1991 ASA meeting in St. Louis, ACAS members made a number of decisions designed to move the organization forward to a new level of activism in the decade of the 1990s. ACAS established thirteen issue working groups: US Aid and US Foreign Policy; Scholar Activists; Academic Freedom in Education; Regional and Pan-African Linkages; Why Africa has fallen off the Policy Map; US Support for Authoritarian Regimes; Democratization: a Guise for Destabilization; Environment; Africa's Economic Crisis; South Africa's transition; Post-apartheid Development in Southern Africa; and the Financial Intellectual Complex. Doe Mayer and I coordinated group number 8, "Health: Whose Agenda?" (see ACAS Bulletin 35). Issue Working Group papers (including ours) appeared in Bulletin 38/39, "Proposed agendas for scholars of Africa" in 1993.

In 1995 I edited a special double issue of the Bulletin on Health and Africa (number 44/45), with significant African input on issues ranging from female genital mutilation to World Bank and World Health Organization policies for African health care. In 1998, a second bulletin devoted to health appeared, "Health and Political Violence" (number 50/51); based in part on panels at ASA in 1997, this issue covered events in Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa and Sudan.

Since then there has been a steady contribution of articles on health issues to the ACAS Bulletin and, in 2006, a special issue devoted to AIDS (number 74). I feel satisfied that this issue is now an established part of ACAS debates and permanently on the ACAS agenda. I want to extend my personal thanks to all editors, guest editors and contributors: ACAS Bulletins are great teaching tools, and in the era before the internet the Bulletin was able to get

topical material into circulation much faster than academic journals.

As Bill Martin notes in the overview (this issue), the work on health helped ACAS reach beyond the southern Africa solidarity model and changed the makeup of the ACAS Executive, Board, etc., bringing in new people with different expertise and interests. The work on health led and reflected changes in ACAS and the scholar-activist world more generally. With the consolidation of ACOA and the Africa Fund into Africa Action, Salih Booker undertook a major push to reorient US government policy on aid to the AIDS epidemic, and Bill Minter has maintained our interest with regular bulletins from Africa Focus excerpting policy documents on AIDS in Africa.

An interesting byproduct of the health issues, or so it seems to me, is the introduction of women's issues. In 1999, Ousseina Alidou and I edited a double issue on women and war (number 55/56). It remains the only ACAS Bulletin devoted to women's issues, although occasional articles have appeared (viz. numbers 62/63, 68). It is ten years since ACAS published a double issue on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (number 53/54). Since 1998 over 5 million people have died in what some have described as Africa's first international war. An epidemic of rape has been reported—but not in the pages of the Bulletin. The issue on Africa's resources (number 75/76) does not link the plundering of Congo's mineral wealth to the vicious assaults on women. (For anyone interested in the connection, see *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo* (www.thegreatestsilence.org). It is my hope that in the coming decades ACAS will include an analysis of/by women in every special issue, whether the theme is Africa's resources, new politics, race, debt reduction, or . . .