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Growth, Gender and Equity- NEPAD and the Renaissance: Myth or Reality?

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**Introduction**

A scan of countries across the globe show us that the vast majority of the poorest countries are located in the Southern hemisphere and are disproportionately present in the African continent. Despite years of struggle to get out of the malaise of underdevelopment, the continent is still trapped in poverty. Conditions that prevail continue to dehumanize and oppress large segments of populations particularly women on the continent. Decolonisation in the narrow political sense may well have taken place but economic and cultural colonization, very often in disguised and subtle forms, still persist in these globalising times. The new face of globalization with India and China as the emerging giants and continuously searching for cheap sites of production and sources

of supply of raw materials on the African continent should not be seen as mere South South cooperation but rather what it means for people's livelihoods on the ground.

The new multiple forms of oppression and exploitation resulting from these new forms of colonialism penetrate every sphere of peoples' lives. This paper argues that development cannot and should not be seen within the narrow confines of growth and that the current obsession with growth and wealth creation can impact negatively on issues of equity and livelihoods, leading to an exacerbation of the feminisation of poverty and to new challenges for governance.

It is an established fact that women are the poorest of the poor on the continent. This paper goes beyond a feminist critique of NEPAD and extends the thinking/critique of scholars such as Randriamaro and Longwe to argue that if there is to be gender justice and a more equitable world, there is an urgent need to develop and consolidate gender inclusive democratic developmental states. Only such states can contribute to make of NEPAD a more 'capabilities enhancing' NEPAD and allow for a true Renaissance.

In interrogating NEPAD and the growth obsession, the paper also speaks to Diane Elson's theory of 'Male Bias' and shows why it is important for Africa to break the gender silences that prevail in the theory and practice of development. The failure to do so will mean that attempts to 'make poverty history' would be tantamount to mere rhetoric with the risk that the continent gets further marginalized and its people more impoverished. The paper ends by making some recommendations towards the eradication of poverty and pleads for gender inclusive democratic developmental states.

## **Part One**

### **NEPAD and its gender blindness**

In the fifty years since Africa began its liberation from the yoke of colonialism many attempts have been made to articulate a purposeful development paradigm for the

continent. In October 2001, a new initiative dubbed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was launched. NEPAD, an economic programme of the African Union was designed to meet development objectives for Africa. It resulted from the merging of the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Program (MAP), proposed by presidents Mbeki, Bouteflika of Algeria and Obasanjo of Nigeria, with the OMEGA Plan of President Wade of Senegal. Since then, NEPAD has been the subject of numerous conferences, meetings and debates, some of which have reached very optimistic conclusions about NEPAD, others have been more skeptical. The skepticism can be captured in the trenchant critique of the Accra Declaration, which, emerged from a joint conference organised, by Third World Network (TWN) and CODESRIA in Accra in 2002. The Accra Declaration identifies these as elements of 'fundamental flaws' contained in NEPAD:

- a. The neo-liberal economic policy framework at the heart of the plan ...repeats the structural adjustment policy packages of the preceding two decades and overlooks the disastrous effects of these policies.
- b. The fact that in spite of its proclaimed recognition of the central role of the African people to the plan, the African people have not played any part in the conception, design and formulation of NEPAD.
- c. Notwithstanding its stated concerns for social and gender equity, it adopts the social and economic measures that have contributed to the marginalisation of women.
- d. That in spite of claims of African origin, its main targets are foreign donors, particularly the G8.
- e. Its vision of democracy is defined by the needs of creating a functional market.

f. It underemphasizes the external condition fundamental to Africa's developmental crisis and thereby does not promote any meaningful measure to manage and restrict the effects of this environment on African development efforts. On the contrary, the engagement that it seeks with institutions and processes like the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act and the Cotonou Agreement will further lock Africa's economy disadvantageously into this environment.

g. The means for mobilisation of resources will further the disintegration of African economies that we have witnessed at the hands of structural adjustment and WTO rules. (Accra Declaration 2002, para 10 a-g).

Whilst the Accra declaration points to the fact NEPAD adopts social and economic measures that contribute to the marginalisation of women, it does not tell us how such marginalisation can be counteracted nor does it allude to the gender blindness of NEPAD. The next section looks specifically at the gender blindness of NEPAD.

### **NEPAD, the state and gender**

Despite these critiques, because of NEPAD's emphasis on good governance linked to development (which resonates in the international financial architecture setting), it has attracted considerable support. NEPAD affirms that 'today the weak state remains a major constraint on sustainable development in a number of countries. Indeed one of Africa's major challenges is to strengthen the capacity to govern and to develop long-term policies. At the same time, there is also the urgent need to implement far reaching

reforms and programmes in many African countries.’ (NEPAD para. 23) The goal of these reforms, as articulated in NEPAD, is to ‘enhance Africa’s rapid integration into the world’s economy.’

But the rapid integration of Africa into the global economy does not ensure either a betterment of African women’s lives, or the much sought after African Renaissance. African women have expressed their concerns about economic reforms and the ‘marketisation of governance’ where the state is rolled back and reorganized ‘in the form of deregulation from public interest to regulation in terms of private interests. (Taylor, 2000) In particular, gender equality advocates have underscored that current trends indicate that states have become instrumental to servicing the interests of market forces. Often, these interests are not the same as those of the dispossessed. Moreover, the growing feminisation of poverty across countries reveals that the reorganising of the state bears little relation to the process of social transformation (Taylor 2000). NEPAD seems to pay very little attention to such concerns.

### **Gender blindness of NEPAD**

It is perhaps premature to start analysing the consequences of NEPAD. What is however clear is that NEPAD, the latest initiative by African leaders aimed at attracting investments into the continent, has demonstrated the same confounding blindness to gender. NEPAD’s gender insensitivity and blindness have been very well documented by Randriamaro (2002) and Longwe (2003) but neither of them highlights the articulation between the potential of a human gendered faced NEPAD and the African Renaissance.

Although a ‘commitment to gender equality’ is generally among the principles associated with African Renaissance, and has indeed become a catch-all phrase, women in the continent find themselves increasingly trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty. The liberatory and emancipatory project of the African Renaissance appears more and more difficult to achieve. The growing feminisation of poverty is confirmed in the UN Human

Development Report (2003). Yet all major initiatives, including NEPAD and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), commit to gender equality. Is it just in order to be politically correct that these, and other development documents include a section, on gender equality? As stated above, The African Renaissance cannot be explored without interrogating NEPAD, because many agree that NEPAD can be a catalyst to the African Renaissance.

## **PART TWO Articulating the potential for a human gendered face NEPAD and the African renaissance**

The African Renaissance is a multifaceted philosophy/framework which encompasses different dimensions for the renewal, revitalization and reawakening of Africa. The history of the continent is one of multiple forms of exploitation. Unshackling the continent from the legacies of these exploitations demands a new vision. It is this very vision which, is captured in the notion of the renaissance, based on, among others, the following principles:

- Economic recovery of the African continent;
- Political transition and democratization;
- Building more equitable relations between Africa and the world economic powers;
- Mobilising Africans to reclaim as well as take their destiny into their own hands;
- Ensuring a people centred development;
- Working towards the development and consolidation of African knowledge systems; and
- Commitment to gender equality.

The concept of African renaissance, as pointed out before is not new but it has perhaps gained currency since South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki made reference to it in his famous speech 'I am an African'.

The African Renaissance is upon us. As we peer through the looking glass darkly, this may not be obvious. Africa reaffirms that she is continuing her rise from the ashes. Whatever the setbacks of the continent, nothing can stop us now! Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace and however improbable it may sound to the skeptics, Africa will prosper (Mbeki, 1996).

Africa's prosperity can only be triggered and sustained if truly gender inclusive developmental states are developed and consolidated.. In other words, women in Africa must be treated as full fledged citizens and be given every opportunity to use their potential fully. And for this to happen, all development frameworks should get rid of the multiple male biases which often infuse policy documents.

Throughout the world, not only have citizenship, development and belonging been confined largely to male indicators, the tendency has been to 'invisibilise women' by rejecting 'their experiences as evidence' (Pettman 1999, 216). Men continue to be used as 'the norm against which [women] as "otherness" can be measured' (Imam 1997, 27). Yet to discuss development, citizenship and belonging in the context of globalisation meaningfully, it is important to document how different women understand and relate to the identity markers which, male-engineered structures of economic development bring to bear on them. While much research by feminist scholars elsewhere has been done in this regard (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999) in Africa serious research sensitive to the predicament of women at different levels of society within and across national and regional boundaries remains to be done (Imam et al 1997; Mama 2001).

For African feminists, the added challenge is to appreciate the complex economic and political processes set off by the revival of liberal pluralism and the imposition of neo-liberal reforms in virtually all sub Saharan countries over the past decade. Although the visibility of women in the public sphere has improved in many countries, the consequences of the reforms are by no means uniform or necessarily conducive to democratic gender relations.

While it is clear that African perspectives informed by African predicaments have not gotten the recognition and representation they deserve in the face of 'Western ethnocentric false universalisations' on matters of gender, African scholars in this area must take on board Ayesha Imam's warning against replacing such false assumptions with 'equally false essentialisations of Africanity' (1997, 23). It is a point echoed by Francis Nyamnjoh (2001, 26), who observes that in Africa, 'gender can only be useful as an analytical tool if those seeking theoretical and methodological space for it are not simply keen on substituting one orthodoxy with another'.

Hence the need, Ayesha Imam argues, to be less concerned with 'the source of analysis than its nature and implications', and therefore, to criticise theories 'not because they are Western, but to the extent that, having developed in cultural, historical, class, racial and gender realities in the West, they misrepresent African realities and obscure analysis of Africa sui generis (Imam 1997, 17). As she puts it, a perspective is therefore African-centred not in the sense of an uncritical rejection of theoretical perspectives from the West and an equally uncritical endorsement of whatever passes for African, but rather, in the fact that it is concerned with African women and men, and owes a particular political commitment and responsibility to them and their predicaments.

Such a perspective must be sensitive to the unequal and often racist relations that have marked encounters between the West and Africa. It must also draw from Western-



developed theories and knowledges only when these are free of ‘false universalisations’ and demonstrate knowledge of African realities, histories, and relationships of unequal exchange with the West through slavery, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and attempts to misrepresent African in order to ‘fit Western-focused categories’ (Imam 1997, 23-24).

In many African countries in is the way in which natural resources are organised, distributed and/or appropriated which gives rise to conflicts and dispossession among large segments of the population. It is disheartening that such a continuing inequitable and unjust order, acknowledged by many, does not sufficiently capture the attention of contemporary African leaders, the architects of NEPAD. Asserting that Africa must plug into the global system without interrogating the inequitable structural situation and this highly unjust order in which the continent finds itself, is highly problematic. The NEPAD framework document states that:

The challenge for Africa is to develop the capacity to sustain growth at levels required to achieve poverty reduction and sustainable development. This in turn depends on other factors such as infrastructure, capital accumulation, human capital, institutions, structural diversification, competitiveness, health and good stewardship of the environment (para. 64)

Yet this same document is silent on the inequitable order and the mechanisms that continue to contribute to poverty and the skewed distributions of income and wealth between and within countries, and says very little indeed about the position of women.

Feminist analyses have sought to unmask the gendered character of the neo-liberal discourse, underscoring the gendered metaphors and symbolism that naturalise the relations of dominance. Neo-liberal discourse draws upon gendered binaries in

privileging finance over manufacture, market over state, global over local, and the consumer over the producer. For instance, the market is represented as robust as against the feminised state, which, is represented as a drag on the economy that must be subordinate to the market. The state thus seeks to re-masculinise through a role similar to the private sector, minimising welfare and increasing its role of surveillance and coercion (Marchand and Runyan, 2000). The changing form and nature of the nation state alongside the rise of right wing political parties and state sponsored fundamentalisms has thus been an area of focus in feminist debates on globalisation (Moghadam 1996). Writing about Africa, Mohau Pheko (1999) maintains that liberalization, in the context of globalization, represents a site of terrorism and violence against women. Trade liberalisation is viewed as a form of economic terrorism on women's socio-economic rights. Observers who concur with this view see globalisation and trade liberalisation, and all the institutions that promote free trade, in need of a strong gender analysis. Pheko writes: "They argue that it is necessary because the violence generated by this model is decorated with seductive language, adorned with such symbolic clothing, that we get seduced and mystified by what we see not realising how insidious and violent its impact is until it is too late.' (1999, 77)

That social good is best served by self-interest is a travesty. Without some basic morality, human social order is not possible. Amartya Sen notes that 'goals can be achieved only if society changes its social relations such that the objectives of democratic causes such as socialist, feminist, anti-racist, environmentalist cohere and means and ends interpenetrate to achieve the desired moral outcomes (Sen 1999, 85).

For African Renaissance to be embedded, and for the nexus between African Renaissance and development to be strengthened, there is an urgent need to effectively inscribe gender into development theory and practice; but this too depends on profound and far reaching changes in all facets of society. Africa should strive to find ways and means of compelling the rest of the world and itself to work towards the 'interpretation of the ends and means' alluded to by Sen so that development and the African Renaissance become real.

## **Neo-liberal agenda – a disabling policy environment for women**

In many ways NEPAD is a replication of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the 1980s and is infused with a neo-liberal philosophy. This economic agenda that rose to dominance in the early 1980s, was centred on macro-economic stability and fiscal discipline. What this meant was a rolling back of the state. Needless to say, women were its greatest victims. The present ideology of the market that pervades NEPAD can once more impact negatively on women and marginalise them further. NEPAD must therefore be transformed into a human faced and ‘capabilities enhancing’ NEPAD and it is through the construction of democratic gender inclusive developmental states that this will be possible.

### **Part three**

#### **Gender equitable policies through gender inclusive democratic developmental states**

Gender inclusive democratic developmental states refer to states which have been elected by the people and which formulate and implement gender equitable policies for the attainment of its development goals. The rejection of all forms of what Diane Elson calls ‘male biases’ in policies and legislations are therefore necessary for a truly African Renaissance (Elson 1989). The success of the East Asian countries during the second half of the twentieth century has attracted the world’s attention. Countries such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan have, during the post-world war period, enjoyed impressive economic growth rates and rapid industrialisation. Growth models that rely on individual entrepreneurs reacting to market signals could not predict or explain the kind of transformation that occurred in East Asia. Ha Joon Chang (1999) demonstrates how the state played a critical role in this unprecedented process of economic and social transformation. This explains why these states were described as developmental. More

precisely Chang (1999) defines the developmental state as one which considers the objectives of long term growth and structural change seriously and which at the same time has the potential of creating and regulating the political and economic relationships that are necessary for sustained industrialisation. According to Chang, conflicts are bound to happen during the process of change, but political management of the economy helps to mitigate these conflicts and an engagement with institutional adaptation and innovation is also required in order to achieve the overall objectives of growth and structural change

Leftwich's (1995) definition of developmental states, in some ways, echoes that of Chang. Leftwich argues:

...developmental states may be defined as states whose politics have concentrated sufficient power, autonomy and capacity at the centre to shape, pursue and encourage the achievement of explicit developmental objectives, whether by establishing and promoting the conditions and direction of economic growth, or by organising it directly, or a varying combination of both (p. 401).

Woo Cummings (1999:1) explains that the developmental state is a 'shorthand for the seamless web of political, bureaucratic, and moneyed influences that structures economic life in capitalist North East Asia.' According to Skocpol (1995), a state's means of raising and deploying financial resources tells us more than any other single factor about its existing and immediately potential capacities to create or strengthen state organisations, to employ personnel, to co-opt political support, to subsidise economic enterprises, and to fund social programs. More importantly, a developmental state must be socially anchored. According to Peter Evans (1997) developmental states combine:

...Weberian bureaucratic insulation with intense immersion in the surrounding social structure. How this contradictory combination is achieved depends of

course, on both the historically determined character of the state apparatus and the nature of the social structure in which it is embedded (pg 80).

Beeson (1999, 2) describes the developmental state and its objectives as a 'rational plan which, is determined to influence the direction and pace of economic development by directly intervening in the development process, rather than relying on the coordinated influence of market forces to allocate economic resources. The objective of the developmental state is to promote development by attending to important social and economic goals. Beeson concludes that the democratic developmental state is able to do this because it has ensured widespread social consensus on the importance and relevance of this particular path towards economic development.

In his description of the developmental state, Edigheji (2006) emphasises the organizational capacity of the state. This feature is essential in defining and promoting the development goals of a country. Edigheji, citing Evans, points to the importance of the state forming alliances with key social groups in order to achieve its development goals.

The discourses on the developmental states themselves tend to be gender blind. In a paper titled Gender silences: Omissions or part of the big picture? Mansah Prah (2006) notes: '...the gender silences we experience as individuals and as nationals of different countries of the global community have occurred not because they are simple omissions or slip-ups in development theory and practice. Like the minute spaces found in any hand woven cloth, the silences constitute an integral part of the fabric of the discourse of development.'

In addition to suffering from gender silences, the practice and theory of development also suffers from important male biases, as Diane Elson aptly demonstrates. 'Male Bias'

highlights how the potential and contribution of women are often ignored and can take various forms.

### **Different forms of male bias**

The first kind of male bias consists in ignoring the fact that that some kinds of male work are socially constituted as ‘women’s work’, while other kinds of work are socially constituted as ‘men’s work’. Changing the relative monetary rewards of different kinds of work will not result in a smooth reallocation of labour from one to the other in the face of gender barriers.

The second kind of male bias consists in ignoring the unpaid work required for the process of reproduction and maintenance of human resources. This process is not explicitly included in macro economic thinking. The economy is defined principally in terms of marketed goods and services, with some allowance made for subsistence crop production in developing countries. The work of caring for children, the sick and the old, of gathering fuel and water, preparing food, keeping the house clean, managing the household etc is excluded from the economy. The very exclusion of such work from macro economic thinking and policy making constitutes a built in male bias.

The implicit assumption of macro economic policy is that the process of reproduction and maintenance of human resources tells against women. Women’s unpaid labour is implicitly regarded as elastic – able to stretch so as to make up any shortfall in other resources available for reproduction and maintenance of human resources. Women’s unpaid time is often invisible to the macro economic policymakers.

The extent to which women’s contribution continue to be ignored and their ‘invisibility’ remains a problem is reflected yet again . For instance, Venter and Neuland (2005)’s edited volume of some thirty chapters with four hundred pages on development issues does not devote a single chapter to the plight of the African woman and the gender issue. The absence of gender in such works highlights the need for an urgent deconstruction of masculinist knowledge production systems.

Peter Evans (1997) focuses on the powerful contemporary role of neo-liberal ideologies and makes an assessment of 'stateness' in this context. He argues that the neo-liberal ideologies have framed elite attitudes about both the international and domestic role of the state. The neo-liberal narrative creates the negative atmosphere that presently surrounds any assessments of the state capacity:

What the current global ideological environment does is to ensure that responses to a genuine crisis of capacity will be defensive. Strategies aimed at increasing state capacity in order to meet rising demands for collective goods and social protection look foolish in an ideological climate that resolutely denies the state's potential contribution to the general welfare... The problem of closing the capacity gap is redefined as a project of constructing a leaner, meaner kind of stateness (Evans 1997, 62-87).

Africa cannot do with a leaner and meaner kind of stateness. Africa needs the hands of the state to be very strong and visible – though this does not imply states in which the elite will continue to exploit resources in the interests of the privileged few and perpetuate a status quo.

The African human condition is such, however, that it will not be possible to make progress unless states are brought back in and governance consolidated. Much is being said about governance and good governance in NEPAD but more importantly perhaps, we need to question the concept of good governance and what it contributes toward social and gendered governance.

### **Gendering Governance for an Improved Human Condition**

Since it is established that women are at the heart of development, it is very important for governance to be urgently engendered, reminding us of the UN dictum that 'without engendering development, development itself is endangered.'

Kevane's (2004, 2) succinct summary of the plight of a large number of women and girls in Africa shows the amount of work that remains to be done to make governance and development more gendered. Kevane notes that women continue to face unequal educational opportunities; less inheritance and ownership of assets; discrimination in employment and occupations; violence at home and in public spaces; and limited political representation. These conditions result in diminished welfare and a reduced capacity to fulfill life aspirations.

Africa as a continent remains excluded -- it has a marginal role and location in the global system and remains very poorly integrated. While many people speak of the marginalisation of the African continent, Samir Amin (1974) argues that the continent is not marginalised but rather that it is insufficiently integrated. One can perhaps go further to suggest that it is not simply a question of the extent of Africa's non-integration but that Africa's non-integration raises a moral question: The 'marginalisation and mal-integration' of Africa in the global system illustrates the unequal power relations and terms of exchange that persist.

In fact, one of the major criticisms lodged against NEPAD is its insufficient attention to the inequitable world order and the unequal nature of partnerships. (Bunwaree, 2006) If Africa's marginalization is not reversed, gains made so far, particularly on gender relations, run the risk of being eroded.

As we move further into the new millennium, the relentless struggle for a human faced globalisation, peace and gender equality becomes increasingly urgent. Much has changed since the first 1975 United Nations Conference on the Decade for Women. The world has moved from seeing women as victims, to viewing them as integral actors in transformation and change. But if globalisation remains unequal and unfair, with poverty spreading its tentacles and conflicts increasing, the chances of an African Renaissance taking root and becoming entrenched remain dim.



## **Conclusion**

It is clear that globalisation is not working for the world's poor, particularly women. It is not working for much of the environment. It is not working for the stability of the global economy. Some may be tempted to say, let's abandon globalization, but others will no doubt argue that it is inevitable. However globalisation can be reshaped to realize its potential for good; and if Africa speaks with one voice – inclusive of the voices of its women -- there is hope for increased space for the construction and consolidation of gender inclusive developmental states. The agenda of African feminists should therefore focus on:

1. Insisting on the importance of eliminating illiteracy among poor women as an urgent first step towards women's entitlements, expansion of their choices, implementation of their rights and enhancement of their socially acquired capabilities.
2. Working and advocating for the removal of legal obstacles and cultural constraints to women's access to and control over productive resources such as land and credit.
3. Promoting awareness on the need for poverty eradication programmes to be based on gendered analysis of the nature and extent of women's and men's differential entitlements, choices, rights and capabilities.
4. Encourage international financial institutions to implement foreign debt cancellation, reduction and/or rescheduling programmes on condition that resources are directed towards eradicating poverty in general and its gendered dimension in particular.
5. Promote the use of both quantitative and qualitative feminist research methods to analyse the gendered dimensions of relative and absolute poverty, to emphasise the links between economic production and social reproduction and to render

- unremunerated labour visible in order that it may be accounted for in economic planning and poverty eradication strategies.
6. Getting feminists, particularly African feminist economists in at the negotiating tables within the WTO and increase levels of awareness about the importance of more ethical trade.
  7. Networking and sharing experiences so that knowledge production and advocacy is done in such a way that it is rooted in and informed by local realities.
  8. Work towards a more effective participation of the representatives of developing countries within global institutions and ensure an equitable role within.

Women across the globe, from the north and the south as well as within these divides should join hands, build bridges, use their intellect, spirituality, advocacy and their other competencies and capabilities to fight for a better and more just world.

Without a revolution in gender relations what has been described as women's 'missed potential' by the World Bank will take its toll on the continent and impact negatively on the renaissance.

Great leaders and thinkers, such as Nelson Mandela, have drawn attention to the critical importance of empowering women. In his speech at the opening of the democratically elected parliament of South Africa in May 1994, Mandela said:

It is vitally important that all structures of government, including the president himself should understand this fully. That freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. All of us must take this on board, that the objectives of RDP [the Reconstruction and Development Programme] will not have been realized unless we see in the visible and practical terms that the condition of women of our country has radically changed for the better, and that they

have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life as equals with any member of society (1994).

Changing the lives of women for the better and empowering them to intervene in all aspects of life is the collective responsibility of each and all. There is an urgent need more women to participate in the political affairs of the country. More women are needed not only for a 'politics of presence' but a 'politics of ideas', for a more transformative agenda as well as for the emergence and consolidation of gender inclusive democratic developmental states.

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