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"The Human Dimension of  
Africa's Economic Recovery  
and Development"

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THE HUMAN DIMENSION  
AS THE TEST OF AND A MEANS OF ACHIEVING  
AFRICA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT:  
Reweaving the social fabric,  
Restoring the broken pot

by  
Reginald Herbold Green  
Professor of Economics  
Institute of Development Studies  
University of Sussex, Brighton, U.K.

1. The human condition - the social fabric of people's lives, the state of their cooking pots - is the ultimate test of development. It is also among the vital means to achieving it. The malnourished, the sick, the illiterate, those worn out carrying wood and water cannot work long, hard or very productively. To waste much of Africa's basic economic factor of production - the work of its women and men - by allowing them to remain locked in vulnerability and poverty is not just a human and social failure; it is also gross economic inefficiency.

2. But the reality of what is happening today is starkly summed up in a 1985 UNICEF poster of a young African girl. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" "Alive". For millions of our infants and young children over the past decade it is a plea which has gone unanswered. They are prematurely dead.

3. The average human condition of our fellow Africans - women and men, the young and the aged, peasants and urban slum dwellers, the ill and the crippled, displaced victims of drought and of war - is appalling. Worse, it is not improving - as in most countries it was, however slowly, prior to 1980. It is worsening. The tears in the social fabric are lengthening, the cracks in the pots are widening.

4. These facts are statistically known - for infant mortality and life expectancy, for malnutrition and food supplies, for access to pure water and to sanitation, for illiteracy and access to education, for income per household and environmental degradation. They are sharply illustrated by the opening tables and figures of the main paper's text.

5. The stark reality is that the fabric of many African societies - national, regional and local - has been wrent. The cooking pots of millions have been broken. To pretend otherwise is to deceive ourselves and to betray the poor and vulnerable people; the women, the children, the displaced victims of drought and war, the poor peasants and the equally poor urban slum dwellers.

#### A. OBJECTIVES AND MEANS: PEOPLE AS ACTORS

6. No nation can be great and prosperous; the majority of whose people are poor and miserable. Those words of Adam Smith set out a central truth which many of his disciples now preaching sermons in Africa and at Africans would do well to ponder on and to use as a test of their own proposals.

7. The human condition of individual people, of families, of communities and of societies is, as Mwalimu Julius Nyerere has put it, the only ultimate objective, justification and validation of development. Human beings are ends not objects, actors not things to be manipulated. Of course, increased command over material resources - gross domestic product to use macro-economic terminology - matters for a nation as well as a household. Food and health, education and water, sanitation and environmental protection all require real resources. Of course, balancing income and expenditure - closing external and fiscal imbalances - matter nationally as well as individually. Crushing debt and demeaning begging damage the human condition. Of course, choices

and sacrifices need to be made by States and societies as well as families. The need to provide for tomorrow and the duty to the rising and future generations are central to African thought and society. But these things matter because of what they mean for human beings, especially for poor and vulnerable human beings, not in isolation from, or worse yet instead of, their impact on the human condition.

8. But if people are actors - participants - then they are also in a basic sense means - means to achieving improvements in their human condition through economic recovery and development. Labour and land are two of the three basic factors of economic production. From work applied to natural resources the third - capital - can be won. Created and embodied in productive assets: tree crops and transport systems, improved fields and power plants or dams, hospitals or health posts and factories, houses and shops, schools and mines. But the poverty, the malnutrition, the inadequate access to education of a majority of the people of Africa increasingly weaken their ability to work long, hard and productively. Their poverty increasingly forces them to abuse and destroy the land so the dead bone white of ruined, dead and dying land creeps wider across earth satellite pictures like the destroying cancer it is. By rending the fabric of society, growing immiserization is equally surely breaking the cycles of production, of reproduction and of surplus generation.

9. To regard nutrition, health services and education as the fruits of development to be deferred until after high production, is self-defeating. Only the well-nourished, healthy and literate can consistently and increasingly be efficient productive workers. To see access to pure water, reduction of women's work-load and child survival as goals for after economic recovery is to ensure that there will be, at best, delayed and stunted recovery. Women worn out carrying water for miles, tending sick children and bearing replacements for those prematurely dead are not merely denied their rights as human beings but drained of the time and energy to produce more.

10. Similarly, to restore and to expand output requires the fuller participation in production of the poor, not their exclusion from it. To provide tractors and large irrigated farms for the few and to ignore machetes and jembes (cutlasses and hoes) and improved seeds for the many is economic madness. Not only will it not solve malnutrition (the poor will have no means to buy food); it will not even restore a viable trend rate of growth of agricultural output.

11. Of course there is a need for balance. Production matters. It requires exports as well as textbooks; lorries as well as basic drugs; efficient factories as well as (indeed to produce) jembes and machetes; taxes as well as protected walls. The point is not to argue for basic services instead of production or production by the poor instead of by the not so poor. It is to point out that most present stabilization and adjustment plans do the reverse: they fail to recognize the vital role of basic services and of production by the poor without which recovery will be limited and development (even in narrowly economic terms) virtually unattainable.

B. STABILIZATION, ADJUSTMENT AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

12. Economic malaise, crises and decline have weighed most heavily on poor and vulnerable people. There are several reasons for this, none of which is surprising, but, equally, none is inevitable.

13. When government resources are reduced, provision of basic services and maintenance of infrastructure are cut back. They are usually cut back from the periphery - the feeder roads first, the capital city highways last. When health services face resource crisis usually rural health posts and clinics are hit first and central reference hospitals last. It is to the credit of some African States, medical services and communities (and their external co-operating partners) that there are exceptions to that pattern - in some cases the basic rural and low income urban health services have largely been sustained or even, in some respects, strengthened. But in general the greater the distance - geographic, social, economic or political - from the centres of power, the greater the cutbacks.

14. Similarly, when production falters it is the vulnerable who lose their employment, see the product of their self-employment fall, have their entitlement (income) to food torn away. They do not have the resources to ride out a crisis nor to give the flexibility to adjust to new ways of earning a decent livelihood. Most have indeed adapted; without that they would have died. But millions could not adapt; they (largely infants, children and victims of drought and war) have died.

15. For the poor and vulnerable people of Africa death is very close - their margins above survival are often very narrow. As the proverb puts it - give a rich man less food and he will grow thin; give a poor man less food and he will die.

16. The crises of falling export earnings and import capacity, of eroding government revenues and inflationary deficits, of inefficient policies and under-utilized capacity are very real. But they are not more real nor more important than the crises of rising numbers living in absolute poverty with rising infant mortality, of the re-emergence of killer diseases like yaws and yellow fever virtually eliminated by the end of the 1950s, of school systems near collapse and peasants without tools or seeds. Indeed, they are part of the same human and economic crisis.

17. Therefore, one basic test of all stabilization and structural adjustment, of all economic recovery and development programmes is whether they will improve the human condition - make poor people less poor and vulnerable people less vulnerable by making it possible for them to produce more and by increasing their access to basic services. If a programme cannot pass that test in prospect or in operation, it is fatally flawed and itself in need of structural adjustment or total redesign.

18. This test is stronger than that sometimes proposed of whether the stabilization and adjustment programmes are the basic cause of poverty (of course they are not) or of whether they address the problems of poor and vulnerable people directly injured by some of their components (important but inadequate). It is also a test of present, short-term as well as future, long-term results. Human condition recovery must go step by step with production recovery or neither is likely to be efficient or sustainable.

19. Because the plight of the poor and vulnerable is the most desperate and urgent, it is useful to indicate more specifically who these people are. Most fall into seven groups:

(a) Victims of prolonged drought and/or ecological degradation whose previous sources of income have been wiped out;

(b) Poor (often female-headed) households pushed by land shortages onto marginal or sub-marginal land - the pioneers and victims of the "rural sponge" effect which has to date limited the rise of open unemployment;

(c) Households in isolated or peripheral (to main centres) areas who are physically and institutionally at the end of the line for all goods and services (whether public or private sector) and usually suffer first and most severely from decreased flows;

(d) Small producers, usually primarily engaged in self-provisioning but also selling food even when they have a nutritional deficit, because it is their basic cash income source, who are unable to increase or even sustain output in the face of declining access to inputs and static relevant technological knowledge;

(e) Victims of war dislocated, like those of drought, with loss of access to health, education and water as well as of land, herds, homes, tools, seeds and foodstocks and plunged into a context of physical insecurity while government resources and physical capabilities are debilitated by war bills and destruction;

(f) "Informal" urban sector members whose numbers have risen even as the incomes of the formal sector they served and supplemented fell and whose slum or exurb areas have become ever more crowded and ever less well provided with basic services;

(g) Urban wage earners, formerly above the absolute poverty line, whose real wages have plunged so sharply that they and other household members have had to add on "informal" sector economic activities to limit the vertiginous fall in their living standards, indeed in many cases to survive at all.

## C. HOW DID WE GET HERE?

20. How the economies of most African States and the human condition of most African people came to be so debilitated as they are today matters. It matters not primarily to win debates or to apportion blame but to understand how to win clear and "to look our mistakes squarely in the face lest we fall into repeating them" as Rector Rui Balthasar Santos of Eduardo Mondlane University once put it.

21. The radical, general worsening of the situation dates to 1980. After very low growth over 1970-1975, most African States made fairly rapid economic progress over 1976-1979 and human condition indicators showed some - even if limited and unequally distributed - advances. Since then most of Africa's economies have been on a declining path in terms of per capita output while poverty and vulnerability have been growing. Why?

22. One major reason, probably the dominant one so far as output per capita declines in the majority of African States are concerned, is the 1979-1987 evolution of the international economic environment confronting Africa. The 1979-1982 recession and slow 1983-1987 recovery in the industrial economies have had a disastrous impact on Africa's exports valued in terms of import capacity. Over 1976-1981 a World Bank study showed several African economies - e.g., Côte d'Ivoire and the United Republic of Tanzania - as among the worst affected. Many primary products' real values (import purchasing power per unit exported) are at 50-year lows and the recent slight recovery in metals and virtually all projections give little promise of significant change. At the same time, protectionism and industrial economy dumping have hampered export diversification.

23. The financial flow position has also worsened. Real net concessional finance per capita (grants and new soft loans less interest and repayment on old) declined sharply from the mid-1970s to early 1980s and, at best, have been stagnant since. Non-concessional flows have gone negative. Africa has a debt burden relative to exports greater than that of any other region; payment on present terms is not possible and the attempt to sustain it is dramatically limiting imports, choking off recovery and worsening the human condition. That is not the view of African Governments, ADB, ECA and OAU alone, analyses by the World Bank and the British Chancellor of the Exchequer come to the same conclusion.

24. Drought, on virtually a continental basis, has exacerbated the already unsatisfactory food production trend. After good years in 1985-1986, 1987 has seen several localized droughts. Until food production levels in normal years, especially by poor peasants, are much higher and vulnerability of output to drought is reduced, this scourge will regularly derail recovery efforts or put them into reverse.

25. For many African economies the macro-economic and human costs of war are greater than those of any other exogenous shock. Nowhere is this as brutally clear as in southern Africa. Angola and Mozambique production (excluding oil) is about half what it would be, had South Africa not waged

war against them, directly and by proxy. As detailed in UNICEF's Children on the Front Line, 1 million souls are dead as direct or indirect results of the war, up to 12 million driven from their homes, up to 8 million in danger of starvation.

26. Not all causes of economic and human condition decline are exogenous. African Governments have made policy mistakes and have been too slow in responding to the worsening external context. In all candour, however, it should be noted that many of these decisions were taken on external advice and are now attacked by those who once pushed them. However, with the adoption of Africa's Priority Programs for Economic Recovery, 1986-1990 (APPER) and of national rehabilitation, recovery and renewed development programmes by a majority of African States, there has been substantial improvement on the economic policy front. That again is not the judgement solely of OAU or ECA; the World Bank and the United Nations General Assembly have said the same.

27. However, these economic policies to date frequently do not give adequate attention to the human dimension nor enough priority to improving it, not simply to increase human welfare but also to sustain and accelerate economic growth. That is not a new weakness; it typified most development plans and programmes of the 1960s and 1970s. Then, however, with less constrained resources and a less hostile international economic environment, the old export led, dependent, central city and high-income group focused model was consistent with some improvement in human condition indicators in general and in basic services extension in particular. Today and tomorrow no such compatibility is likely to be within the grasp of most African States. Either the nature and priorities of development will be re-thought and acted upon on new premises or what economic growth there is will march hand-in-hand with rising levels of inequality and poverty, misery and instability.

28. One concrete example is health. Life expectancy is much lower and mortality much higher in Africa than in the industrial North. The largest single difference is in infant and under-five mortality - 30 per cent of all deaths in sub-Saharan Africa, 2 to 3 per cent in most industrial economies. The main causes are neo-natal tetanus, five epidemic diseases (including measles, tuberculosis and polio), malaria, impure water-related morbidity (including diarrhoea), and malnutrition-related diseases and loss of resistance to disease. For older children and adults, malnutrition and impure water-related diseases, malaria, a handful of epidemic diseases and accidents treatable by first aid are the dominant killers.

29. But urban hospital care is largely irrelevant to reducing these death tolls in Africa as it was in Europe. It takes 60 to 70 per cent of the typical African health budget. Primary health care (including first aid), basic drug lists and supplies, extended immunization programmes, oral rehydration and simple health education (including sanitation) are of proven low-cost effectiveness. But they receive 10 to 15 per cent of the majority of African health budgets. The case for rethinking and reallocation seems clear.

30. The warning of Cheik Amidou Kane is even more timely now than when he first made it in 1965:

"Frustrations and failure will mount if we do not immediately summon the courage to revise the ways we think and take action."

D. HOW CAN WE WIN CLEAR? WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

31. To will an end is to will a means or a set of means adequate to achieve that end. To make the human condition integral and central to Africa's economic recovery and development requires a comprehensive political and socio-economic strategy encompassing at least eight elements:

(a) Recognition that people matter and are both the subjects and ends of and the main means and actors to attaining stabilization, recovery and renewed development;

(b) Understanding that throwing away much of Africa's most basic factor of production - the labour of its people - as many modernization and narrow stabilization strategies do by excluding the poor and vulnerable, is economically wasteful and inefficient;

(c) Acting on the reality that marginal rates of economic as well as social return from enabling poor people to produce more are often high. The real problem is making small, contextual, poor people centred projects visible to central decision takers and credible to bureaucrats and analysts, and then altering regulations to be compatible with implementing them;

(d) Comprehension that health, education and pure water are not merely human and social goods (basic as that point is) but are important to maintaining present and raising future economic productivity and to making possible fuller participation in production by women who are the chief victims of illiteracy and the human beings on whose backs falls the burden of fetching water and caring for the sick;

(e) Focusing on employment and production, not subsidies and relief, e.g., through public works programmes to relieve drought or seasonal income losses;

(f) Articulation of short-term priorities to lay foundations for long-run sustained development, e.g., in applied, field-tested, peasant user friendly, producer cost-effective agricultural research begun now to make it possible to sustain 5 per cent agricultural growth in the late 1990s. Until then input restoration, infrastructural rehabilitation and generalization of best-known farmer or (more rarely) off-the-shelf research techniques can restore 4 to 5 per cent output growth, but not beyond;

(g) Political as well as economic awareness that participation in production by poor people is crucial to underpinning their survival and the improvement of their human condition. Without it their social and political participation will remain limited and perpetually at risk;



(h) Comprehension of the extreme economic inefficiency of rending the fabric of society - strikes and riots, go-slows and loss of morale, steadily growing grinding poverty and recurrent economic disasters without human rehabilitation are devastating in narrow economic as well as social, political and human terms.

32. The poor and the vulnerable are not amorphous masses; they are groups of human beings. To fail to see what their needs are as perceived by themselves is to exclude them; to suppose their needs and capabilities are uniform is to render many of them invisible. In no case have these errors and blindnesses been as common or as persistent as in that of women. Most African women are excluded or invisible but also over-burdened and under-assisted. The basic barriers to economic as well as human development posed by the excessive work-load most African women bear are rarely recognized clearly. The implications of the gender division of labour in agriculture are yet to be taken account of by agricultural research and extension.

33. These are central elements in any serious effort to improve the human condition. After all, over half of our people are women and they care for our children and produce most of the food we eat. How to address them is not simple and varies from context to context, but three elements are crucial:

(a) Universal access to literacy, basic education, primary health care, pure water, agricultural inputs, and fuel are disproportionately beneficial to women because when access is limited they are disproportionately deprived of them;

(b) Serious attention must be addressed to reducing women's work-load, e.g., by closer water and health facilities, by programmes (e.g., immunization), reducing child illness, by improving technologies relevant to female tasks (e.g., food processing, moving water and fuelwood);

(c) Women should be centrally involved in planning and taking decisions about projects and programmes which will primarily affect them, e.g., rural water supply and maintenance, sanitation, food crop research and extension.

34. To will a strategy must lead to addressing questions of method. To cross a river requires a bridge, a raft, a boat, a tunnel or a ford (or perhaps a very good swimmer!). The same is true of economic recovery and development strategies giving central priority to the human dimension.

35. It should be clear that the three goals of standard stabilization and structural adjustment strategies do matter. More production is crucial, but in addition more of it must be by poor people. Reduced external and fiscal imbalances are necessary, but priority should go to increasing supply and not cutting uses important to the poor and vulnerable. Bad policies and restrictions inhibiting production and especially poor people organizing to better their own human condition should be done away with, but not in any false faith in the perfection of markets or universal goodwill of the powerful and rich.

36. But those methods are not enough; more are needed. These include priorities in government expenditure which include and move toward universality, e.g., more primary and preventative health care relative to hospitals and more food availability to poor people (through their own production or earning incomes adequate to buy it). That, in turn, requires much more emphasis on increased productive employment and self-employment.

37. The importance of moving to universal access to basic services has already been underlined. With it goes development of basic survival, disaster period support and rehabilitation mechanisms. Disasters will recur; the question is how to minimize their human damage and to speed the progress of rehabilitation, neither of which national nor (a fortiori) international disaster relief mechanisms have done very well to date. Again closely linked is acting on the perception that environmental and ecological protection is vital to the future human condition of poor Africans. Millions are being condemned to life sentences of poverty and to early deaths by the present pace of environmental degradation and destruction.

38. These priorities require both production and government spending. Budgetary balance should be restored and sustained primarily by increasing revenue. Domestically, more production can allow more tax revenue and more efficient and progressive tax systems. But in the short run, Africa needs additional external support, additional support that accepts the primacy of African goals, respects the knowledge and judgement of Africans and which can be used to meet African requirements for improving their human condition through their economic recovery and development.

39. These elements cannot be more than sketched here. They are set out in more detail in the main text. In addition, examples of programmatic formulations flowing from them are set out in its annexes.

40. Unless stabilization and structural adjustment as usually defined today are broadened to make the human condition, and especially the human condition of poor people, central and integral, African economic recovery will be stunted and African economic development unsustainable. The challenge of turning around the post-1979 (or earlier for some countries) decline is a heavy one, but it must be accepted. A proverb from the Mara region of the United Republic of Tanzania cited by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere in his opening address to the South Commission is appropriate:

"Rabbit, where are you going?  
I am going to kill the elephant!  
Can you do it?  
Well, I'll try and try again!"