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**PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT AS A DIMENSION IN AFRICA'S
DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION EFFORTS**

by

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**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION
IN THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN AFRICA**

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Introduction : A world caution

As prevalent paradigms of development fail to solve the increasingly desperate economic and social situation in Africa, policy-makers have begun to look for alternative workable models, and of late have been waxing lyrical about "popular participation" as a way of restoring their declining credibility. Even the "Development bureaucracies" of the Bretton Woods institutions have begun to see the merit of the "participatory" approach. For example, in an article in the IMF journal, Finance and Development, titled "Can local participation help development?" Michael M. Cernea, learning from Mexico's PIDER programme, wrote:

Local participation was conceived as a way of improving the quality and effectiveness of these investments. In many cases, decision making without the involvement of the beneficiaries misdirected funds, while the participatory approach succeeded in improving their allocation.^{1/}

Cernea goes on then to outline what he calls "the new participatory planning methodology" involving a sequence of three phases : (a) field community assessment, (b) preliminary programmes, and (c) final programmes. In each phase, the roles of technical agencies and local groups are carefully identified; specific procedures, sociological and the technical aspects of investment planning are taken into account; and popular participation ensured through arrangements under which local communities contribute to the total cost - in cash, in labour, or in locally available materials. Already, the discerning eye will see a problem in this "methodology", but to this we shall come later.

If the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is not to get bogged down in the naive populism inherent in the word "popular participation", then it should ask some searching questions on what "participation" means in the concrete conditions of Africa, and what "development" has meant in the last decade or so. The ECA, let it be dropped, is a late-comer onto the "participation bandwagon", but as all late-comers it can at least take advantage of hindsight and check itself before stepping on to a ground already (mis)appropriated by the likes of the World Bank, the IMF and the EEC.

We say this not to dismiss "popular participation" as a perspective towards "development", but as a warning against going about it in a simplistic manner. If participation is to be thought of simply as a new "technique", "methodology" or a new "gimmick" that will pull Africa out of its present bleak situation, then the ECA is best advised to stick to a more straightforward and honest language of justifying its role (itself an issue for appraisal) rather than adorn it with a populist smokescreen behind which the exploitation and oppression of the masses of Africa continue unabated in the next millennium. The ECA, if it is not careful, could be holding the African milk cow with a populist participation banner in the air whilst imperialist hands milk her. That would be a crime against Africa.

So let us get a few concepts cleared up first.

Conflicting conceptions of Development

Conflicting conceptions of development abound, of which we identify four main ones.

- (a) Development as "Growth"
- (b) Development as "Welfare"
- (c) Development as "Empowerment"

(d) Development as "development of the inner spirit"

These are not (excepting the last one) just abstract or historic categories of "pure" thought based on some universal principle of "development". The first is the dominant bourgeois concept of development born with the rise of capitalism. Development is seen in terms of increasing "gross domestic product" or "per capita income", and is associated with increasing capitalization of production moving to higher and more sophisticated levels of technological application, industrialization and declining share of agriculture in total output, consumerism, declining population, increasing sophistication in the use of financial instruments such as the substitution of equity with debt capital through "leveraging", etc. There is assumed to be a linear progress from lower to higher levels of "development", and the benefits of this process is supposed to "trickle down" from the richer classes to the poorer ones.

Development seen in terms of "growth" is not merely a "conceptual" category or simply an "idea". Nor has it anything to do with "idealism" in the sense of promoting certain universal "values" towards which humanity should "ideally" aspire. Also, despite the "trickle down" supposition, it has, in theory and in practice, very little to do with human welfare. However, it has a strong material basis to it. The concept of development as "growth" is rooted in capitalist production, and at a material level it follows certain recognizable laws of motion driven by, to use a popular term, "profit" – a mystifying euphemism for value extracted for unpaid labour.

Development in this sense is promoted as an ideology principally by the capitalist ruling classes of the world (both in the developed and the so-called "underdeveloped" countries). The Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank, the IMF, and GATT) set up at the end of the Second World War and periodically modified in the light of changing circumstances are there to "monitor" the development of the world economy along certain assumed lines of "linear growth".

Unfortunately, capitalist growth is neither linear nor even. It is dialectical and uneven. Out of its unevenness arises social inequities. Some people have too much (wealth, power, etc.) whilst others have little or none; some are employed whilst others are semi- or un-employed. There is inherent in capitalism a tendency towards concentration of wealth and power and not a "trickle down". As with society so with nature. Capitalism exploits nature leading to its waste, spoliation and degradation. Furthermore, out of its dialectical character arises a struggle between opposite forces manifested at the social level, among others, by on the one hand those who labour and on the other by those who own capital, and at the material level by on the one hand nature and on the other hand capital.

The capitalist State intervenes to modify economic policy and/or social programme in order to even out the unevenness of growth characteristic of capitalism, and to mediate between classes in contradiction. This is what gives rise to our second concept – that of development as "welfare". Development in this sense is measured in terms of the quality of life using indices such as "equitable" distribution of income, life expectancy, nutrition, infant mortality, literacy, education, access to employment and such amenities as housing, electricity, telephones and toilets.

This second concept of development also has a strong material basis. Economically it too is rooted in the capitalist system of production and exploitation. Historically this welfarist model of development arose out of the struggles of the working classes against the inequities of capital whereupon capital incorporated or co-opted elements of its anti-thesis to forestall its own denouement in a reformist modification of the capitalist system which preserved it in its essentials whilst removing some of its excesses. This is the so-called "social democratic" solution to

the inequities of "pure" capitalism. In this sense, the so-called "mixed economy" is not, as some say, "part socialist and part capitalist". It is simply capitalist with State intervention to remove some of its excesses, and it began not with "third world" economies but with Bismark in Germany during the 1870s.

The third concept of development – development as "empowerment" – is of more recent vintage. (A few years ago, some people used to call it development as "liberation", but "empowerment" is the "in-thing" these days). It stands in opposition to the first two concepts, for it seeks to transfer economic and political power from those who have it now to those who are powerless, or, to use a term of popular usage, the "grassroots". But to a more elaborate explication of this concept we shall come later, since it is closely linked to the principal subject for discussion in this paper, namely "popular participation".

The last concept of development – development of the "inner spirit" – need not detain us for long here except to say that we do have some sympathy with this perspective. This is not to detract us from a materialist conception of history, but to acknowledge that the dialectic of mind and matter cannot be reduced to one-sided philosophical materialism. Also we mention this concept of development in deference to those of our spiritual colleagues whose numbers are large, and growing, and who seek to define development in terms of inner spirituality in opposition to the crass materialism of our consumerist epoch.

The next question is: where do we locate the present debate in Africa within the above definitional diversity? What developmentalist "model" are those making policy in Africa talking about these days?

Dominant developmentalist debate in Africa

We would say that the present "official" debate (i.e. debate among policy-makers) is located mainly between the first and the second – i.e. growth and welfarist – concepts of development. In most African countries, governments in the 1970s and 80s used to describe their "development plans" in terms of either "growth" or "growth with equity" or similar such categories of confusion. The debate now, as we wind up the decade of the 80s, is fast leaving the "equity" stage and narrowing down to "saving those who can be saved" from a clearly visible impending disaster. To understand this, a little historical digression is necessary.

In the 1960s (and part 1970s) the "growth" concept as defined above was the dominant concept in African official discourse, and economic planning was done in most African countries usually with "directives" (called "recommendations") from World Bank officials, (often with semi-literate ideological rational written by Harvard-trained "experts"). The 60s were supposed to be the "development decade" for Africa, and development was conceptualized in the sense of "growth" as outlined above – increasing GDPs, "trickle down" and the rest of the illusions of the "growth" model. Predictably however, whilst some "growth" was recorded, it did not measure up to expectations and, above all, the social cost in terms of marginalization of the weaker sections of the society became staggeringly visible, with its antecedent manifestations of unemployment, collapse of rural communities, and urban squalor. It would be only a slight caricaturisation to say that the official orthodoxy (propounded by the World Bank) blamed it all on "overpopulation" and the alleged propensity of Africans to produce too many babies. So then came the shift to "growth with equity" in the 1970s and 80s. The primary thrust of all "development" effort was still "growth" with all the by-now discredited categories of development (increasing GDP, increasing industrialization, etc.) still very much intact, with, however, a few differences in detail – such as an emphasis on "export orientation" instead of "import

substitution", on better agricultural prices, on liberalization of imports, etc. The major difference, however, was in the acknowledgment that the social cost of the "growth" model must now be faced squarely in the planning process rather than be handled in an ad hoc manner, as in the previous decade. And so social policy came to acquire as respectable a position as economic policy.

It still didn't work. If anything, the situation in Africa worsened. Even by its own indices of "growth" Africa was poorer at the end of the 1980s decade than at the beginning. For example, in 1978 GDP per capita in Africa was US\$ 854; by 1988 it had dropped to US\$ 565. Whereas in 1978 investment was 25.2 per cent of GDP, by 1988 it had fallen to 15.8 per cent. And, most strikingly, Africa's debt rose from US\$ 48.3 billion in 1978 to a staggering US\$ 230 billion in 1988, with debt-servicing as a proportion of export earnings increasing almost threefold.^{2/}

Of course, the social manifestation of increased impoverishment of the African continent is, the human terms, unbelievably painful to watch. One does not have to visit refugee camps - and there are so many of them in Africa these days - to witness destitution and inhuman conditions of "existence". I have attended "rural development" meetings in Africa where women could not attend because they only had torn clothes in which to present themselves, and eight out of ten bare-foot children milling around would have distended stomachs. However, all this is presented in less painful de-emotionalized statistical categories in the tricolour-shaded graphs of World Bank's Annual Reports. But it would not be too wrong to say that anywhere between two-thirds and three-quarters of the rural population in Africa I know (eastern and southern Africa) survive through relief hand-outs by governments of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or their locally funded "partners".

Thus, towards the close of the 80s, and as we approach the 1990s, nobody in Africa is talking about "equity" any more. It is obviously an unattainable goal. There is now simply a question of "bare survival" of the African population. The World Bank now incessantly talks about "structural adjustment" purely at the economic level. It is back to the "growth" model. But instead of "equity" for all the talk now is about saving the "vulnerables" - those "damaged" by the structural adjustment programme of the Bretton Woods institutions.

The human cost of the so-called "structural adjustment" has been amply documented. A 1987 Study by UNICEF came to the following conclusion:

The analysis above has shown that among IMF-assisted countries improvements in current account balance were recorded in 56 per cent of countries in the 1980s, but in almost 60 per cent of these countries growth deteriorated or did not improve in the first programme year, and real investment levels also declined or stagnated between 1980 and 1983 in almost 60 per cent of the countries with Fund-assisted programmes. With falling output and, at best, mixed evidence about changes in income distribution in many developing countries, the number of people in poverty in many "adjusting countries" increased.^{3/}

Of the 10 third world case studies carried out in the UNICEF study, the authors had something positive to say only for one of them.

The number of people below a given poverty line has almost certainly increased in Ghana, the Philippines, Chile, Jamaica, Peru and until 1984, Brazil. Only for South Korea is there evidence of declining absolute poverty. The situation is unclear in Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Botswana.^{4/}

Gone, therefore, are the days of "equity". The current orthodoxy is "adjustment with a human face" and the protection of the "vulnerables" who are victims of the structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank/IMF. Let the Bank explain its own philosophy:

The Bank seeks to assist governments in identifying ways and means of mitigating adjustment costs and to modify the design of the policy and institutional measures accordingly. During the implementation of the adjustment programme, the government and the Bank need to monitor closely any negative impact of the programme on the most vulnerable sections of the population and help to develop compensatory programmes, targeted on the affected groups as required 5/

It is in the context of this overall strategy of the WB/IMF that the "participatory" approach is now advocated. The UNICEF study goes on to outline this strategy:

Two elements would strengthen governments' ability and determination to achieve adjustment with a human face. On the one hand, Community participation (emphasis by the authors) can play a critical role - in helping to formulate policy, in providing the administrative mechanisms for aspects of the programme... and in providing resources of labour and food to pay for some basic services... On the other hand, the international community (emphasis authors') can also play a crucial supporting role by providing additional resources for governments which adopt policies that protect the vulnerable and promote growth (emphasis by YU) and by being prepared to reallocate their own existing commitments to these ends. 6/ Contrary to the conventional approach - by which reduction of external and internal imbalances is achieved by demand and import restraints, often entailing a decline in GDP as well as in investment in physical and human capital - adjustment with a human face involves a restructuring of the economy so that major imbalances are eliminated at a satisfactory level of output and investment while human capacities are maintained and developed."

Policy-makers in Africa are fast imbibing this new ideology of development. For example, at the end of the 10 May, 1989 "consultation" between the World Bank, and among others, the African Development Bank and the ECA, a Joint Statement was issued, the most important parts of which read:

... it has become clear that adjustment must be seen as part of a long-term development approach and that it must take full account of the human dimension. .

While sustainable economic growth is imperative, it is only the means to the overarching objective of improving human welfare - for example, reducing infant mortality, increasing educational opportunity, improving health and ensuring food security. ... Particular attention should be given to protecting the vulnerable groups during the adjustment process... 8/

This is as far as the official debate has reached in Africa as of today. "Growth" with protection for the "vulnerables" is the new strategic objective of "development". It is an admission that a comprehensive programme of equity is no longer attainable; all that can be done is to save the dying and the most afflicted victims of structural adjustment programmes.

In line with this policy, for example, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and other allied organizations now talk of "selective", not "comprehensive", medical care, concentrating on the six most common diseases among children and not the gamut of other illnesses to which they fall victims; and "vertical" treatment of selected diseases, not a holistic and community-based programme of health care. Furthermore, most northern non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa, even those that call themselves "developmental" organizations, have become simply "welfare outposts" of aid agencies to save the "vulnerables" from the catastrophic consequences of the World Bank-IMF-directed "structural adjustment" programmes.

That is how matters stand at the present. It is against this background that "popular participation" has entered the lexicon of development literature and development strategies, and we turn now to an analysis of this concept.

Conflicting conceptions of "participation"

Like "development", participation too has myriad meanings. We discuss below only four of those that we regard as significant for our discussion.

- (a) Participation as mobilization (for production)
- (b) Participation in decision-making (for democratic rule)
- (c) Participation as other - empowerment (power "abnegation")
- (d) Participation as self-empowerment (power seizure)

The first concept is as old as history, and goes back to the age when slaves were "mobilized" to build colossal pyramids in the memory of dead Pharaohs. It is a skill developed in our own epoch by colonial rulers who mobilized the colonized peoples to build (with free labour) roads, ditches and "bomas", a skill now further perfected by our present rulers in Africa who, in the name of "socialism", even "Marxism-Leninism", "mobilize" the peasantry into "ujamaa" villages, or "resettlement" programmes, or "food for work" programmes. Participation here means simply the provision of labour.

However persuasive (or self-deluding) the ideological embellishments to this kind of "participation", it is, stripped of the flummery, no more than extraction of labour from the wretched and the poor. These are the "participatory" projects of today - women who are "mobilized" to dig wells for their water from which they are first deprived and distanced by elite-serving policies, men who are "mobilized" to mould bricks (without payment for their labour) to build schools for their children in the name of "self-help" or "Harambee!" because the central government funds go to equip schools for the children of the rich with computer gadgetry, etc. These "participatory" projects are different from the Pharaonic pyramids and the colonial pit-latrines only in form and detail.

The second concept - participation in decision-making - corresponds to the "social democratic" variant of the development concept that we discussed above, and has arisen in similar circumstances. It serves the same objective of "reforming the system without yielding its essence. Participation in "decision-making" at various levels of State authority is only a concession made to the "democratic" principle that the masses must be seen to have participated in the making of the laws and regulations that legitimize the appropriation of their labour.

Sometimes "participation" takes the form of "decentralization", meaning the "grass-roots" are "given" the authority to participate in the formulation and implementation of their own development programmes. In reality, however, nothing

of the kind happens. "Decentralization" is only looking at the other end of the telescope from what in reality is centralization. I know from practical experience in the field of local government in Africa that decentralization has never – but never – meant genuine participation by the grass-roots in determining their destiny. Policies that really matter are always determined from "on high" and gravitate downwards towards the lower echelons of social hierarchy, whilst surplus value moves upwards from the socially and politically deprived to those who have power and wealth.

The concept of "worker participation" in capitalist enterprise is yet another example of the co-optive character of the concept of "participation". We need only look at the level and kinds of "decision-making" allowed to workers by management to understand the obviously duplicitous use of the word "participation" – give the worker a "sense of participation" while surrendering nothing to him/her in terms of real control.

Therefore, much of what passes in the name of "participation in decision-making" to the lower classes of society (peasants and workers) is duplicitous and, sometimes, cynically dishonest. Let us be candid enough to admit that extant "socialist" bureaucracies are as guilty of this kind of dishonesty as the free enterprising capitalists.

The third and fourth concepts – participation as empowerment – arise out of the struggles of the working people against those who have economic and political power. Once again it used to be called participation for "liberation", but it has now been replaced by the term "empowerment", mainly because the term "liberation" got almost exclusively appropriated by the liberation movements fighting against colonialism and racism. Whatever the relative merits of the term "empowerment" as against "liberation", both terms, for our purposes, have the same political meaning.

We distinguish between two variants of participation as empowerment. The concept of participation as "other empowerment" is a patronizing variant of participation as "self empowerment". It is patronizing because here "empowerment" is undertaken at the behest of the powerful who feign to transfer power from themselves to the grassroots, from top to the bottom. It is as if they are the ones who are empowering the lower classes. The lower classes do not take power, they are "given" it.

In reality, history tells us, the top-dogs seldom transfer power voluntarily. They "empower" the under-dogs:

- only to the extent that it suits their interest,
- or to co-opt the under-dogs into the system;
- or to forestall "worse" things happening.

Finally, we have, of course, participation as "self-empowerment" which comes about as an exercise of collective will on the part of the disempowered themselves. Here the powerless seize power on their own initiative and for their own sake – like what happened in the French Revolution and the Russian and Chinese Revolutions. What happens after the people have seized power is, of course, another issue, for as the "Restorations" of post-Napoleonic France and the recent happenings in Eastern Europe and China show, the process of peoples' seizing power has its own ups and downs.

But before we leave this subject, we have almost an obligation to say something about the origin of the concept of "participation" and how it came to be distorted in recent times.

A brief history of the concept of "participation"

"Participation" actually is a part-substitution of the concept of "conscientisation" which was first introduced by Paulo Freire in his The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and subsequently popularized by every self-respecting "animator" who worked in the area of mobilizing the poor and the wretched of the earth to help them shake off their shackles of exploitation and oppression. Left intellectuals carrying out research in peasant communities in the third world found a new meaning for "research" – one that was not purely academic but was involved in "praxis". Let one of the pioneers of "participatory research" explain the concept himself:

The Cartagena World Symposium of 1977... launched the methodology now known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). ... PAR has shown itself to be an endogenous intellectual and practical creation of the peoples of the Third World. ... Its main components derive from the regional appearance and diffusion of theories of dependence (Cardoso, Furtado) and exploitation (Gonzalez, Casanova), the counter theory of subversion (Camilo Torres) and the theology of liberation (Gutierrez), dialogical techniques (Freire) and the reinterpretation of these on scientists' commitment and neutrality taken from Marx and Gramsci, among others....

Its aim is to achieve "power" and not merely "growth" for the grass-roots population. This total process simultaneously encompasses adult education, scientific research and political action in which critical theory, situation analyses and practice area are seen as sources of knowledge.9/

Here is another clarification:

Participation has to be conceived as an active process where the initiatives are taken by the people themselves guided by their own thinking, and using means and processes (institutions and mechanisms) over which they can exert effective control. The people decide, act and reflect on their actions as conscious subjects. This concept has to be distinguished from passive participation which only involves people in actions that have been thought out or designed by others and controlled by others.10/

After this we need only say that like all good words invented by the left intellectuals trying to find a space for themselves, "participation" too has got co-opted into the vocabulary of the dominant classes and, as our earlier quotation from the IMF Journal shows, it has become the opposite of what it was supposed to mean. In its distorted version, participation has simply become a "methodology" or a "technique" for "mobilizing" the "masses" so that capital investment projects are successfully implemented, or so that free or poorly paid labour is extracted from the people to carry out the "structural adjustment" of the economy whose social ill-consequences for the "vulnerables" are ameliorated through programmes that give such adjustments a "human face".

Some practical experiences in participatory development

We must distinguish between three kinds of experiences:

- (a) Genuine experiences in self-empowerment;
- (b) Partial successes in self-empowerment; and
- (c) Prostitution of the participatory process.

Some practitioners of the "participatory" approach have recorded significant achievements in the genuinely "self-empowering" sense of the term. Thus, for example, Orlando Fals-Borda recorded that in Southern Colombia an active group of intellectuals and political cadres worked with the peasants and the result was a research-oriented popular movement which influenced the struggles of the local black communities, especially in the towns of Perto Tejada and Caloto. Similar work was done in Mexico among the local Otomi Indians and Mestizo peasants of Mezquital Valley.¹¹ In June, 1989 I attended a conference in Managua where the Minister of Education graphically explained how the participatory approach to education was the key to the conscientization of the population in preparing them for the revolution against the Somoza regime.

However, the vast majority of the "participatory development" efforts fall into the third kind of experience i.e. they are corrupt versions of the participatory model as defined above by Fals-Borda and Tilakaratna.

The principal reason for this corruption has been the enormous amount of "development aid" that has poured into the third world. Much of this "aid" is through official bilateral and multilateral channels. Since early 1980s, however, there has been an incredible proliferation of the so-called "non-governmental organizations" (NGOs) involved in "development" with the grass-roots people. Much of this started out in the early 1970s as acts of "solidarity" by peoples and churches of the "first world" towards the "suffering people" of the "third world". In the 80s, however, the governments of the "first world" began taking an increasing interest in these "NGOs" as conduits to channel capital into the third world. Thus, according to OECD figures, during the 80s, the NGOs in the OECD countries annually channelled \$ 2.9 billion into the third world countries on their own account, and another \$ 1.5 billion on behalf of their governments. Thus, about 15 per cent of the total ODA funding is now channelled through these NGOs.¹²

The attraction that northern governments have for their NGOs as conduits for channelling capital is that the northern NGOs:

- (a) Have support of the ordinary people in their countries who want to "do something" for the "poor" people of the third world;
- (b) Are seen to be more sensitive about third world concerns;
- (c) Are sensitive to ecological concerns;
- (d) Have "appropriate" technologies; and
- (e) Are flexible and non-bureaucratic.

In reality, however, whilst the northern NGOs are indeed more flexible and "sensitive" than their governments, most of them, objectively, carry out two kinds of functions:

(a) They open up "virgin" land and "subsistence" labour in the third world to "the market" for exploitation by western industrial corporations selling tractors, hybrid seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and industrial machinery:

(b) They perform the "welfarist" role that fits into the "adjustment with a human face" strategy of the World Bank, IMF. Many of the northern NGOs that used to "target" their funds onto what they used to call 'the poorest of the poor' now increasingly and consciously target these to "the vulnerables" in the third world societies.

This is not to dismiss the genuinely humanitarian concern that many of those who work for northern NGOs feel towards the people of the third world. Unfortunately, their subjective feelings have very little to do with the objective role their organizations play in our countries. Through a lack of a proper understanding of the socio-political context of African development, and through the infusion of "easy" money that go to subsidize production, the northern NGOs have wittingly or unwittingly killed the initiative of the grassroots people and made them purely passive recipients of "aid". This process is further assisted by the fact that most African NGOs are headed by bureaucracies whose life styles depend on securing money for the local NGOs for which they work. They have learnt the skills to write projects for fund raising, part of which (in some cases as much as 50 per cent) then goes to "overheads" including their salaries and benefits, and part goes to buy tractors, seeds, fertilizers, sewing machines and water pumps.

This is the story with regards to most of the "grassroots" organizations in Africa which purport to be "participatory". This is not to say that these kinds of "participatory" projects do not benefit the people: they do benefit some of them. But they are not participatory in the self-empowering sense. In fact, the people lose their sense of dignity in the process of creating a dependence for donor funding for the sake of "mere survival".

Finally, there are those experiences where the local effort has been partly successful in self-empowerment. Such organizations as the Se servir de la saison sèche en savane et au Sahel (Six-S in Burkina Faso, the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) in Zimbabwe, and Action pour le développement rural intégré (ADRI) in Rwanda are examples of such organizations.¹³ These are genuinely indigenous efforts aimed at building on the initiatives and resources of the people. However, insofar as they too have become dependent for much of their work on external donor funding, they have lost that degree of independence which is necessary for them to be self-reliant. Also, in the case of many of these locally-initiated efforts, there is so much that centres around the charisma or strong leadership of one or two persons that the extent to which they are genuinely democratic must be seriously questioned. Furthermore, as recipients of donor funding, many of them become islands of relative privilege surrounded by a sea of poverty of the people not so well organized or skilled to know how to secure donor funding.

This, then, is one of the fundamental weaknesses of even those organizations which are genuinely based on local initiatives. Unless their efforts can provide an alternative development strategy repeatable and implementable at a national level, their success will continue to remain only partial. Of course, the difficulties and dangers of "going national" cannot be underestimated. As ORAP's Sithembiso Nyoni explains:

Village-level development organizations that begin to take seriously their situation and start to organize for change often tend to threaten national governments' perceptions of their overall responsibility for the populations under their charge. Consequently, such organizations, when they are tolerated, tend to remain focused at the local village level, and to restrict themselves to local village projects outside of the regional or national context. As such, their impact is bound to remain localized and ineffective.¹⁴

Conclusion: Role of continental organizations such as the ECA

Because of the conference requirement to keep this paper short we cannot discuss this very important and strategic question at length. We shall only throw a few (what might appear to be controversial) ideas for further brainstorming.

First, we think it is important that the ECA does not endorse the "adjustment with a human face" strategy of "development" which is currently in vogue. This is not to say that the ECA, or for that matter any continental organization, should not be concerned about the fate of those people who are victims of the economic system imposed on the people of Africa. Such a stand of unconcern for the plight of the people cannot be morally defensible. What is argued, rather, is that any pan-African organization cannot allow its credit to be used to legitimize a system of exploitation that impoverishes the people of Africa, and then is called upon to "patch up" the damage.

Secondly, the ECA, if it is genuinely interested in participatory development, must learn from the historical experiences of the people themselves. Ever since the imposition of colonialism on Africa, the people have reacted in one of three ways: they have passively succumbed to oppression and exploitation; or they have adapted to the new situation by actively creating institutions to fit with the new regime of oppression; or they have actively resisted oppression.¹⁵

If the last twenty years of African experience has anything to teach us it is that the situation of the lower classes in Africa is far worse today than two decades ago, and that the spirit of resistance is increasing. No amount of "adaptation" through World Bank or UNICEF inspired "gymnastics" of trying to "humanize oppression" through providing hand-outs to the "vulnerables" will pacify a people for the vast majority of whom their only future is unemployment and impoverishment.

Thirdly, the ECA has an obligation to provide to the policy-makers in Africa with a thoroughgoing expose of the manner in which corporate capital exploits the people of Africa. This capital, we must add, includes that provided by organizations like the African Development Bank (ADB) whose only African-ness is the first name in its title, but which otherwise is very much part and parcel of international finance capital.

Fourthly, and in view of the fact that the struggle against exploitation and oppression is not just an African problem but one which concerns the people in the other parts of the third world as well as all progressive people in the "first world" it is necessary that the ECA actively links up with all those individuals and organizations who are in favour of a world of economic justice and political democracy. This is not as abstract an objective as it might sound. In the "first world" they have created institutions like Amnesty International founded on a commitment to protect certain categories of human rights. The mandate of these organizations could be expanded; alternatively, new institutions can be founded, at the initiative of the

people of the third world, whose mandate includes monitoring the economic rights of the people as well as their political rights.

Finally, there are a number of genuinely grass-roots organizations in Africa which have secured a certain measure of success at "participatory development" in the sense of collective self-empowerment by the people. The ECA needs to carry out a detailed study of their experiences and difficulties, and to facilitate collective reflection on the way forward for them.

The last five hundred years of slavery, capitalism and bureaucratic variants of socialism have been years of unmitigated war against both nature and labour in Africa (as indeed in other parts of the world). We need to think of new directions for a more civilized world than what the last 500 years have offered.

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