

## 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Rural Women



**Durban Republic of South Africa  
23 to 26 April 2007**

**Theme: Current Developments On Issues Pertaining to Rural Women**

*Shifting Our Platform: In Response to Current Ground Level Phenomena*

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*&*

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## **Section I**

### **Opening Remarks**

Sisters and brothers,

It is a privilege to be invited to this congress by the Government of the Republic of South Africa and I owe this honour to all of you, but especially to my sister, Ms. Zanele Mbeki. When she suggested the title for my presentation, “Current Developments On Issues Pertaining to Rural Women”, I was not surprised as both of us have just i.e. in January 2007, come out of a consultation in Casablanca about which I shall tell you more shortly. At that meeting we confronted ourselves with some of the new phenomena that women in deprivation are experiencing in the world, together with the fact that the poor and poverty have taken a back seat in our development priorities, while money and wealth are dominating our politics and economics.

I am also privileged to be in the company of some of the most illustrious women of the continent, whom I have had the pleasure of knowing intimately over the past two decades - Gertrude Mongella, Graca Machel, Scholastica Kimaryo to mention only a few. I salute the African continent for their women leaders and their leadership of the South countries and thank them again for the education they have provided to me.

I stand before you, not only as an activist from India, but also as a citizen of the continents of the South - who is as much an African as she is an Asian, or an Arab; as much a rural woman as she is an urban. This conference has as its theme *United in Our Diversity: Working Together Towards the Total Emancipation of Rural Women from Poverty and Hunger*. And indeed given women’s unique capacity to unite<sup>1</sup>, we certainly shall forge that unity. But I want to say something else, and that is that we are overplaying our diversity.

My contention or appeal to you today, at this forum, is that the time has come for us to recognise that these distinctions, rural and urban, African and Asian are less relevant today - as I will illustrate to you during the course of my presentation, - and staying with such identities, may distract us from making our claims to change the dominant economic pressures on us.

An international policy framework which spans the whole sky, and has a kind of single mantra or prescription for all, one size fits all, has evened out all of us into one size, too. A Bangladeshi woman worker in a garment export factory is no different from her sister in Mozambique, or Mexico -whether in her cultural inheritance, her age, or in her deprivation or exploitation or even her strength and knowledge. An elder woman in an Indian village, where the men have died or left is coping with the identical problems of her sister in South Africa, HIV/AIDS infected young and old, many dependents, food and water scarcity, but bold and

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<sup>1</sup> Devaki Jain: Gandhi’s bubbling up theory of growth, in “ Women, Development and the UN, a 60 year quest for Equality and Justice, Orient Longmans, 2006, and “Invoking Gyana,\* Women’s knowing, as a vehicle for rebellion”, a background paper for Casablanca Dream Women Weave Peace into Globalisation, 12-15 Jan 2007

brave. So let us reject the distances that were given to us by our colonisers, and anthropologists, by fundamentalists who miniaturise our identities. To quote Amartya Sen, “the miniaturization of human beings, where we must be [one dimensional people] standing in opposition to the things that are not part of us.”<sup>2</sup> and unite to rebel against the given mantras and unite over an idea, a pole, a torch, which can light the way forward.

*Rebellion, to be effective, requires a mass; mass requires solidarity..and solidarity requires an idea which inspires and induces that solidarity. We the women of this Congress are the mass, our quest here should be for that idea around which we can unite. I call it Gandhi’s fistful of salt.*

When Gandhiji picked up a fistful of salt from the beaches of Gujarat, he was not trying to give free salt to the people of India. It was a symbol, an idiom of political assertion, but in a language, a vocabulary which represented the masses of people, not the elites. When President Mandela said in his inaugural speech, “We want *Bread, water and salt*” it was not that he wanted to limit the life style of his people to bread with salt and water: it was to signal the aspirations of the masses again a vocabulary which was representative both of political assertion and to identify with the deprived.

In my analysis of success, in the sense of enduring revolution, I found that what is needed is an idea and this has to be backed by a mass movement. Whether it was Marx who had an idea that generated the interest of the working class, and bound them together in revolution,- an idea that still stays with us and inspires; or Gandhi whose ideas generated effective mass movements of resistance. It seems that there is need for a synergy of the two.

The meeting I referred to earlier of activists and thinkers from the South continents, in Casablanca, Morocco, was inspired by our sister, Fatema Mernissi, a scholar and writer from Morocco. She speaks for the Berber women carpet weavers living in the Atlas Mountains, to do exactly that, namely to

**“Search for that idea, which would make us one, and then go to places like this one, here, the World Congress on Rural Women to seek ideas and solidarity, and through finding a solidarity, *voice* the skills, the culture, the knowledge and requirements of women living in remote rural areas, in ways that can be heard and can transform the sky, which often appears as if it is falling down on us.”<sup>3</sup>**

We were fortunate to have had with us Madam Zanele Mbeki along with a galaxy of others – Judge Navi Pillay from the International Criminal Court also from South Africa, Yassine Fall of Senegal representing AWOMI, Dr Nafis Sadik of Pakistan a fighter for women’s health and rights, and special advisor to the Secretary General of UN on HIV/AIDS and former Executive Director of UNFPA, my colleague from the South Commission Prof Solita Collos Monsod, the eminent Prof Nilufer Cagatay of Turkey who is an expert on women’s engagement with trade

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<sup>2</sup> Amartya Sen, ‘Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny’, (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> Devaki Jain. “Women, Public Policy and the New World Order” Lecture delivered on May 2nd 2006 Jagori & Sangat In Collaboration With India Habitat Centre

and who is with a network which is re-thinking and constructing an economics which will not devastate us.<sup>4</sup>

We felt we must replace the current ideas on poverty removal<sup>5</sup>, even the MDG scale of measure and pressure, even the Beijing Platform for Action which gave us so much strength and forward movement, with a framework which responds to the changed international political economy and its repercussions. We wanted to replace these with the knowledge of women, give voice to our sisters from the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America, who are struggling to protect their histories, their knowledge and their very lives, threatened by the destruction, nay usurpation of their control over water, land, lives.

We brought new headlines, or poles on which we thought we could analyse and provoke change in the thinking of our policy makers and the international organisations demands. We challenged the conventional economists fundamentals, such as balancing the budget, and put forward a new set of fundamentals, namely

### ***Women, Water and Wealth.***

This transliterates as

- Women as idea creators, and the women's movement as the hope for organized creative rebellion
- Water as symbolic of so many dimensions of our lives and aspirations - political, social, economic, environmental, health and cultural
- Wealth symbolic of poverty and inequality, and the current driving force in the world, money and accumulation

We pledged to build a more appropriate theory, a development framework which would enable women in poverty to walk out of it, or not to be trapped into it. The website that we have launched ([www.casablanca-dream.net](http://www.casablanca-dream.net)) gives you an idea of some of our process and outcome.

When we met the Berber carpet weavers in Casablanca, through Fatema, they were our universal sisters from the mountains, and the plains, passing on skills from grandmothers to grand daughters, conserving their resources natural as well as cultural, knowing the kind of society they want to build, but being overwhelmed and often over powered by the increasing mechanisation of carpet making, the inroads into their homes by the ethic of money making, the enticement of the so-called modern world.

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<sup>4</sup> The Working Group on Gender, Macroeconomics and International Economics (GEM-IWG) is an international network of economists that is engaged in issues of gender-equitable approaches to macroeconomics, international economics and globalization: <http://www.genderandmacro.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Jan Vandemoortele Ending world poverty: is the debate settled? March, 2005 Number 12 Poverty Group, United Nations Development Programme

## **Section II**

### **A summary of my arguments**

In this presentation, I am using *the concept of shifting* – shifting our advocacy, our voice, our demand, our resolutions from calling attention to ourselves, i.e. what is called *the need based approach*, to calling attention to the dramatic shifts in ground level phenomena and therefore the need for us to *shift our political voice, our organized solidarity voice from what are the conventional demands of a Rural Women's Congress; to changes in fiscal policy, and international economic relations; in the engines of growth, in the protocols of South-South cooperation, in the value of food and agriculture.*

I will go on to describe the changing phenomena, changed especially in the last ten years worldwide, as the shifting of various elements. I learnt this concept from my Latin American sister Lourdes Beneria,<sup>6</sup> who for decades, has been looking at the condition of women workers in Latin America, with special reference to those in the less privileged sections of society, and finds that recent international economic ideas have ensured that risk is shifted from

- **from the employer to the worker,**
- **from the rich to the poor,**
- **from the factory floor to the home,**
- **from the state to the citizen,**
- **from social cohesion to social conflict,**
- **from the young to the old**
- **and through migration from the men to the women**
- **and through jobless growth also from the men to the women.**

Further if we are looking at macroeconomics, I would suggest that there are some other shifts, such as a shift

- **in the composition of the Gross Domestic Product, the first rank of the agriculture sector has now shifted to the service sector,**
- **in land use from growing crops to hosting export zones,**
- **in the types of the crops grown – from food to cash; a shift from food security to insecurity,**
- **in the centres of power, from the local and national to global,**
- **in control over knowledge, from women and communities to corporations and international institutions,**
- **in cultural values, from sustainability to consumerism, and**
- **in identity too, as the categories of rural and urban are blurred.**

Thus, in my conclusion, what I would put forth to this rich assembly of sisters is : let us unite not only to protest as we do in the World Social Forum, against ideas such as capitalism and globalization; let us not only provide an assorted menu of our needs, our demands, but let us give ideas to ourselves and to the rest of the world, on how to construct an economy which

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<sup>6</sup> Lourdes Beneria, Shifting the Risk: New Employment Patterns, Informalization, and Women's Work International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Issue Volume 15, Number 1 / September, 2001

can be peaceful and just. Let us show our contributions to ideas. Ideas are not the domain of intellectuals. They come from lived experience – our grandmothers. And it is ideas that have influenced the world more than the micro grassroots action we have engaged in. In fact the idea has to carry the message from the ground, from grassroots action.

In my presentation this morning, I would argue that the identity that we gave to rural women is now muted ... The rural woman now is not only a rural citizen, she is also the urban poor migrant and road construction worker, the migrant to other lands in search of work, and so on. The sectoral interest has moved from agriculture and food and water and livelihood to making a mark in the world through percentage of tradable, foreign exchange reserves and military power.

I suggest that there is need for us to shift our voice from a need based approach namely, “*We the rural women of the world demand*” to construction of the pillars of the new political economy. I argue that while each region in the South has different pressures on it. I still suggest and appeal to you on behalf of the poorest of poor women of the world, who are mostly located in rural areas, to come back and to take hold of the idea of economic development, especially waged employment, and the fight against inequality

For example, I can well understand that for the African continent, destructive, frightening conflicts with thousands of refugees and devastating hunger such as is occurring in Darfur and has now spilled over into Chad, is a central concern. While I agree that issues like violence against women, the killing fields for children in India, the militarization of our economies and the reappearance of the dark ages of militant religious fundamentalism are the kind of issues that women now think about, build solidarity and try to change, development must be brought back on our agenda, even if we call it by another name, such as transformation or revolution or paradigm, or whatever. We started that in 1975, in Mexico and at the first world conference of rural women convened by FAO, I think in 1975, which I had the privilege of attending, but we have become sophisticated and broad-based. But now we need to come back to removal of poverty and inequality through employment.

A person who comes to my mind whenever I think of, a person who flags an idea arising out of women’s activism and wisdom, is Wangari Mathhai. Taking a simple idea like planting of trees, she moves all the way to an analysis of the current conflict in the world and how through planting of trees, women can bring peace: I quote from Wangari “The planting of a tree is the planting of an idea.” Wangari related a parable at the 50<sup>th</sup> year celebration at the UN in New York, in 2005, of the humming bird: “Once upon a time during a very large forest fire or bush fire all the animals fled except a humming bird which picked up just drops of water from a river and put it on the fire. When ridiculed by the rest of the animals she said, I am doing the best I can.” Wangari smiled – and said: “And may be if we do that – the best we can, we can even put out the Bush fire!”

In drawing attention to conflict, she says that even the Iraq war, amongst others like the local wars in Congo and Angola, were all for the sake of access and domination over natural

resources. Therefore by attending to natural resources from local to global, we were actually fulfilling the vision of women, namely for a peaceful world.<sup>7</sup>

Over the decades, we have not only generated waste creating development, but we have **wasted development**. And here I use the term 'wasting' in its harshest meaning 'devastating' (Webster) and in criminal parlance 'finishing off'. We have made development into an unwanted impulse. One time in a paper I wrote for Mwalimu Julius Nyerere,<sup>8</sup> I had asked that nations of the world need to be classified NOT according to GDP growth rates or even HDI, but according to three categories of waste:

1. Waste-generating societies: these are usually associated with affluence, with high-tech production, and until recently, with ignorance of processes of recycling material into consumable goods.
2. Waste-recycling societies: where waste utilization becomes an art, a craft, a source of income and wealth creation. By and large these societies have low access to trade, to exchange. They have dispersed isolated populations.
3. Waste-avoidance societies: These are not dissimilar from waste recycling societies but they are usually at another economic and cultural plane. For example in acute poverty there is a perception of wasting as sinful. Scarce resources have to be stretched. Thus choices of both production and consumption are made that do not allow waste.

There is an associated culture of barring wastefulness as sinful, and taboos which bar people from use of certain materials and so on<sup>9</sup>; which respect frugality. Societies which do not generate waste because they simplify their lifestyle, could have a double advantage less environmental damage but greater leveling between people. In other words, greater reduction of inequality.

Similarly with an issue that my sister Yassine Fall has highlighted – *water*. I ask if we could perhaps take this fundamental and multi-dimensional issue of water as a theme or pole – to move to have it recognized not only as a human right - that can then serves as a way to mobilise people around the issue, and that citizens can then have as an expectation and that poor people can demand this entitlements through legal channels. But to also recognize it as a public good that cannot be privatized- that it has to equitably distributed. There is a need for strong national strategies which includes better planning and intervention and expansion of access to the unserved; but *mostly in placing it as priority*.

Women scholar activists have strived to – reveal the flaw in economics in development cooperation, and given voice to ground struggle. They have also shared this knowledge with each other – there is a pool of this wisdom. We need to support one another on this journey. Our tendencies to fall into categories – rural/urban, academic/grassroots, ivory tower/soiled hands has to be overcome. We must challenge these binaries as we have done with other supposedly oppositional associations – subject/object independence/dependence active/passive public/private

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<sup>8</sup> Devaki Jain, "Are we knowledge Proof? Development as Waste", speech delivered at Lovraj Kumar Memorial, Lecture, New Delhi, 26 September 2003 (Reprinted in Wastelands News, Vol. XIX, No. 1, August-October 2003, Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development, New Delhi, pg. 19-300

<sup>9</sup> Devaki Jain, Women, Waste And Planet Safety – Proposal for a North South Alliance, Wide Bulletin, 1992:3

etc and thereby forced discussion and further scrutiny of concepts that were supposedly self-explanatory. We must harvest the intellectual power of feminist development thinkers to lead policy design.

So I repeat that it is time for people like us gathered here, to move from our sectoral interests namely agriculture as a sector, the rural as a domain, to engaging with what I call public policy, the various elements of macro economic policy, that are affecting agriculture and rural women while drawing from our sectoral experience.

### **Section III** **India as a case study**

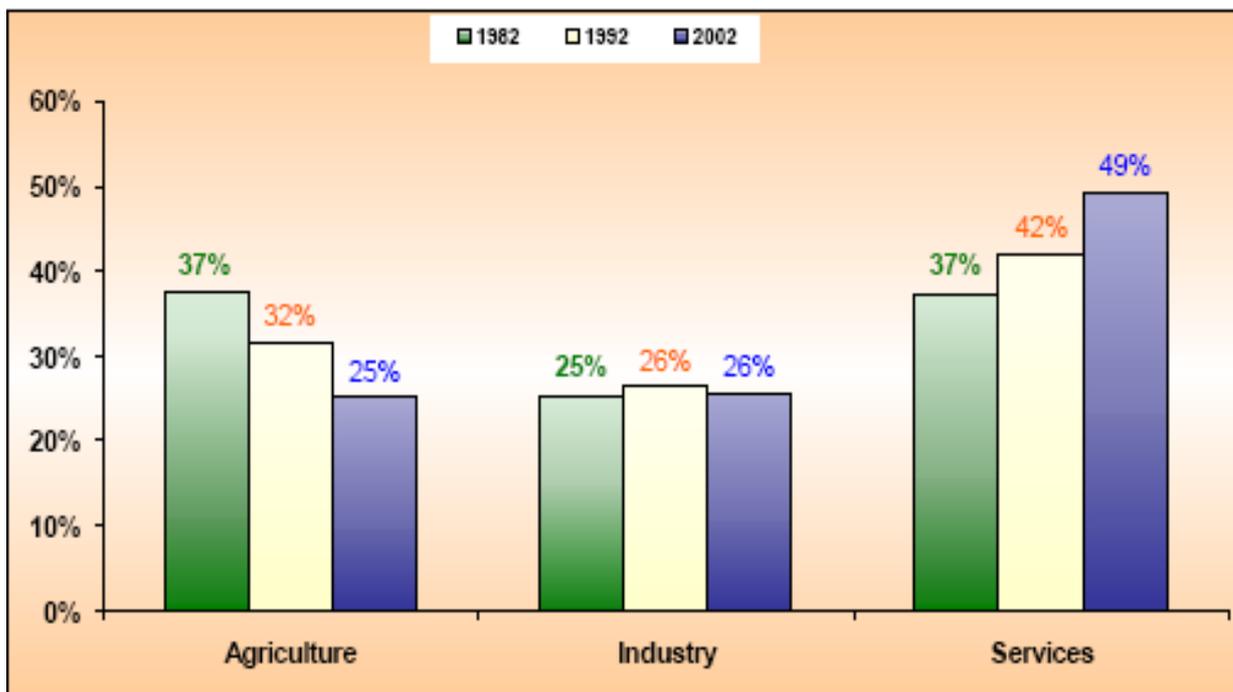
India today is concerned about its poor agricultural growth rate, only 2.3% in an economy that is growing at the rate of 9 % and is celebrated for its success. There is an argument that this success story can be spoilt by the agricultural sectors failure to live up to this glowing growth rate and many extraordinary ideas are being floated to get the old lady going.

The population of agricultural workers in India is estimated in 1998 to be about 207 million, of which about 92 million are women. Fifty percent of these women workers are laborers, 37percent cultivators, 2 percent engaged in animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry, and 11 percent in other activities.<sup>10</sup> Both women and men perform field operations in agriculture, but the processing activities are mainly performed by women. Among the many activities performed by women are clod breaking, seed sorting and treatment, transplanting, weeding and harvesting.

Agriculture accounted for 37% of GDP in 1982, which has declined gradually to 32% and 25% over the last two decades reflecting the more rapid growth rates of other sectors. Yet the income dependence on agriculture remains high, given that 58% of the Indian working population and over 73% of the rural working population still directly or indirectly earns its livelihood from agriculture or related activities. Agricultural growth therefore in turn determines demand growth in other industry segments

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<sup>10</sup> Gajendra Singh, "A Report on Agricultural Production and Processing Technologies for Women in India". Gender, Technology and Development, Vol. 3, No. 2, 259-278 (1999) SAGE Publications



Source : World Bank & India Infoline

The crisis of Indian agriculture is a direct offshoot of the shift in priorities during the early 1990s, as many argue<sup>11</sup>. Growing obsession with the so-called “new economy”, information technology, media and the urban consumer led to a complete marginalization of the “rural” and agrarian sector, with respect to both private and public sector investment. The policies of economic liberalization, according to this perspective, also required the state to open-up all sectors of the Indian economy to global market.

This crisis is evident in constant reports of farmers’ suicides in every corner of the country. This is because of the cascading effect of the capital-intensive, corporate agribusiness-driven, export-oriented, peasant-insensitive domestic policies coupled with the subsidized import surge due to withdrawal of Quantitative Restrictions, which has led to depression in the domestic farmgate commodity prices. The burden of the agrarian distress has fallen on the small and marginal farmers in India. This is a direct result of the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture that protects subsidies in the developed countries and allows them to dump cheap commodities in countries such as India.

The distortions and imbalances in agricultural trade have drastically affected the prices, incomes and livelihoods of small farmers in India. These impacts have disproportionately affected women because of pre-existing gender inequalities in access to and control over productive resources and their roles as both producers and managers of food security in households. The study entitled

<sup>11</sup> Surinder S. Jodhka. Beyond “Crises”:. Rethinking Contemporary Punjab Agriculture. Governance And Policy Spaces (GAPS) Project Centre for Economic and Social Studies Working Paper : 4 May 2005 Hyderabad, India.

'Impact of WTO on Women in Agriculture',<sup>12</sup> conducted in combination with public hearings from various parts of the country, offers an in-depth analysis of the impact of WTO policies on women in India. The public hearings focused on issues like the shift of knowledge and control over seeds and biodiversity from women to multinational corporations and trade liberalisation of agriculture leading to large-scale loss of livelihood, employment and entitlement, and hunger.

Studies prove that, in the past five to seven years, there has been a steady decline in employment opportunities in the rural sector ranging across regions from 20% to as much as 77%. This has resulted in men migrating to other areas in search of work, leaving a lot of the farm operations to women who are paid much less for their work, often less than half of what men get.

In agriculture, the analysis offered is that demand for foodgrains is declining. The prescription is that therefore there is a need to shift to the processing of agricultural products as well as exporting them. But the reality is that the decline in incomes of the poor or the bottom decile,<sup>13</sup> is the cause of the decline in demand for food grains.

Until the start of agricultural liberalisation in developing countries in the early 1990s, the majority of women producers were still able to meet household subsistence needs and to earn a living income in subsistence farming (FAO 2000). In theory, they could have benefited from trade liberalisation in agricultural products, as it might have expanded food production, attract investments and boost farm productivity. However, the majority of poor farmers have not necessarily seen these potential benefits.

Most farm operations in India are traditionally women-centred; our food security depends mainly on the work of women, women's knowledge and women's skills in varied operations like seed-saving, agricultural production, food processing, local marketing and cooking. Women are the providers of food and custodians of our crop biodiversity heritage and hence food diversity. But this foundation is being undermined and a male-dominated, corporate-oriented new food culture is being imposed on the country thanks to the new global order under the World Trade Organisation.

As the income of farmers in general and women in particular are eroded they are displaced from productive roles, and the patriarchal power system that controls the assets further erodes the status of women leading to their marginalisation and increased violence against them. Atomized and fragmented cultivators related directly to the state and the market. This generated on the one hand, an erosion of cultural norms and practices and on the other hand, it sowed the seeds of violence and conflict.<sup>14</sup> as farming is delinked from the earth, the soil, the biodiversity, and the climate, and linked to global corporations and global markets, and the generosity of the earth is replaced by the greed of corporations, the viability of small farmers and small farms is destroyed. Farmers' suicides are the most tragic and dramatic symptom of the crisis of survival faced by Indian

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<sup>12</sup> "Impact of WTO on Women in Agriculture' Diverse Women for Diversity (the gender programme of the Research Foundation of Science, Technology and Ecology, New Delhi) for the National Commission for Women January 2005.

<sup>13</sup> India's Economic Policy - preparing for the 21st Century, by Bimal Jalan, 1996

<sup>14</sup> Vandana Shiva *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Ecological Degradation and Political Violence in Punjab*. London: Zed Books 1991

peasants<sup>15</sup>: disintegration of 'community' and kinship support system, and the rise of some kind of individualistic orientations brought in by the new technology and development philosophy to the Indian countryside.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Section IV** ***Echoes from elsewhere***

Commercialized agriculture relies just as heavily on the work of women as did the family farm. Women are cogs in the machine of a globalized agriculture industry: picking tomatoes in Mexico, harvesting rice in India, planting tea in Uganda, packing peaches in Ontario and fish in Nova Scotia. But while women still play a role in agricultural production, women's control over the means of food production has been significantly weakened. The forced migration, environmental deterioration, and hunger that have resulted from this transformation, have been devastating."<sup>17</sup> As the commodification of food is intensified nearly everywhere, more and more people ... many of them from peasant communities, work to produce food that they may not ever eat themselves." As globalisation shifts agriculture to a capital and chemical-intensive system, women bear the disproportionate costs of both displacement and health hazards.

Women's livelihood strategies, and their support and means of food security are diverse and complex, from cultivating field crops to livestock rearing, to home gardening, gathering, fishing from sources such as swamps, forests, woodlands, wastelands and quarries, etc. But these alternative modes of knowledge and livelihoods are not recognised by conventional agricultural scientists and development experts, who fail to see the connection between women's knowledge, work and skills and community food security, and the creation of wealth.

I will just offer two quick case studies to underline the fact that these occurrences are not isolated or restricted to a particular geographical region.

##### **Subsidised food imports in the Philippines**

In the Philippines, corn imports tripled between 1995 and 2003, forcing many corn farmers to abandon or sell their farms and migrate to the cities or overseas. Women tend to bear the brunt of finding other livelihoods and feeding their families. The majority of the 7.3 million migrants from the Philippines who work overseas are women. Trade policies that promote cash crops and prioritise export-orientated growth work for the benefit of men who have overall responsibility in this area. Similarly, gender inequalities in access to and command of productive assets such as land and credit, or storage and transport facilities, tend to constrain women's benefits from such policies. Moreover, women also lack access to technology and training.

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<sup>15</sup> Vandana Shiva 'The Suicide Economy of Corporate Globalization' 05 April, *Znet* ([www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org))

<sup>16</sup> Ahlawat, S.R.. "Sociology of Agrarian Crises: Peasant Suicide and Emerging Challenges". *Man and Development*, Volume XXV (3). pp. 97-110. 2003

<sup>17</sup> Women and Globalisation: Globalisation and Food [http://www.unpac.ca/economy/g\\_food.html](http://www.unpac.ca/economy/g_food.html)

### **Non-traditional agricultural exports in sub-Saharan Africa**

It is often argued that non-traditional agricultural exports (NTAEs), such as horticulture and organic farming, which generate significant revenues, have the potential to redress the bias against women elsewhere in the agricultural sector. In contrast to the prevailing view, a recent study underlines that in general, it is the male, better-off farmers with large-scale plantations, equipment and capital who have benefited from NTAEs in sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of women are involved in NTAEs as waged labour in large-scale enterprises organised along quasi-industrial lines. Over 65 per cent of workers in Kenya and Zambia are women, and women constitute 91 per cent of horticultural employees in Zimbabwe. In smallholder farms, contracts often depend on the ability of male household heads to state that they can mobilise the labour of women and children in the family (Kabeer 2003). In reality, the production of NTAEs varies along the lines of many other forms of agricultural production; from small farms to large-scale commercial enterprises. Differences in gender roles and the gender inequalities that exist in production of commodities other than NTAEs also apply here.

In short, rural women play a central role in contributing to economic development as resident or migrant labour without the benefits of social security, access to information and to resources. Gaps in our knowledge of their situation and contributions continue to be a prevailing fact.

### ***Section V Where to begin ?***

I started by suggesting that there is such a dramatic change in the ground realities that women are facing, and there is also a strong shift in the international economic spaces and institutions, that we need to **shift our advocacy**, our strategic interventions **from** our traditional ways, namely either sectoral demands and recommendations, such as rural women or agriculture, or offering a list of call attentions where currently, items like HIV/AIDS, Human Rights, Violence against women, mobilization against fundamentalism, are some of our concerns,

- **To engaging in a reconstruction of the meaning and content of development, of economic policy.**
- **To going back to the flagships of the 70's when development meant waged work, livelihood protection, and politics meant fighting for equality or against inequality, and the beginning of all proposals was with the poor, with women in poverty.**

Women scholar activists have over the years provided an ocean of knowledge and ideas for transformation, speaking for and out of the experience of struggle. They have engaged in this deconstruction of economic theory and recognized the importance of rebuilding economic reasoning. In this they need the support of gatherings like this Congress.

The target of reconstruction needs to be the paradigm of development itself, the identification of the engines of growth. The review of the past seems to suggest some dramatic reversal of the current theories of where the engine of growth lies, if the interest is in poverty eradication.

Instead of seeing the poor as a target group, who need special ladders, within a framework of economic development, - enabling the poor to become economic and political agents could itself become the engine of growth. Thus from a “trickle down”, or social net approach, it would be useful to look at what can be called the “bubbling up” theory of growth. This alternative theory would argue that putting incomes and political power in the hands of the poor could generate the demand and the voice that would direct development. The purchasing power and the choices of the poor could direct the economy to a pro poor or poverty reducing economy. Gandhiji, in fact translated such a theory into public policy, during our freedom struggle and soon after. He argued that we must start with the poor, not trickle down benefits to them and his programmes for spinning, and also for marketing of the products of the poor, the handmade, was a brilliant illustration of pulling people out of poverty.<sup>18</sup>

To quote Gandhi and his Talisman:

*‘Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him...’.* My friend Mahbub Ul Haq has also given the TALISMAN pride of place in his South Asia Human Development report.<sup>19</sup>

Thus Indian Political economy, the politics the power structures and the power allocations behind the economy, are always shaded or shadowed by the inhibition about consumption, about social discrimination and the claims of the poor.

I suggest also that Gandhi’s ideas for political economy are now returning as the “new paradigm”. For example, today’s vanguard in development, speaks of discrimination, of morals, of restrained consumption, of poverty eradication and of the importance of building institutions which mediate justice – both economic and social; it admits that economics is about Politics and refers to the ideology and ethics of the leadership. His ideas and practical suggestions **would define sustainable development as that development that can be sustained by the poor, as different from that development which sustains the poor<sup>20</sup>. Thus giving Poor, agency to use Prof Sens concept<sup>21</sup> I had the privilege of presenting this idea and gandhijis bubbling up theory of growth at the Rio plus 10 conference held in Johannesburg in 2002.**

**Growth as one that includes the poor** We need to build a *theory of inclusive growth* – call it gross world happiness or peace ; but as an economist I am perhaps inclined to see how it is economic growth, wealth and money that seems to be driving our leaders, and thus our political economies ... And so to match the enemy’s weapons I want to see if we can create another theory where countries do grow, in other words do enable its citizens to prosper, do eradicate

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<sup>18</sup> Minds, Not Bodies - Expanding The Notion Of Gender In Development Bradford Morse Memorial Lecture U.N.D.P., Beijing Sept. 5, 1995. (Later Published By Beijing And Beyond British Council Division, British High Commission 1996.)

<sup>19</sup> Haq, Mahboob ul. (1997) Human Development in South Asia. Oxford University Press; Pakistan. Page 27.

<sup>20</sup> Devaki Jain. “Women, Public Policy and the New World Order” Lecture delivered on May 2nd 2006 Jagori & Sangat In Collaboration With India Habitat Centre

<sup>21</sup> Amartya Sen, ‘Transition to Sustainability in the 21st Century’, Keynote Address, at the Inter- Academy Panel called Sustainability and Freedom on International Issues, 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2000.

poverty, do provide legal and other securities such as human rights to its citizens, but not in the trampling way that current policies and programs do.

Feminists and others have long argued that growth is a poor proxy for well-being and development; and have sought to overturn given models – arguing for stimulating growth through a livelihood security and wage employment led growth path. This has also been coincided with regionalism, the regional trade agreements, speaking of alternative (or heterodox) trade theories<sup>22</sup> that reject the idea that trade liberalization will lead to economic growth and improved allocation of national resources from inefficient import substitutes to more efficient exportable goods.

The critical issue is not only in making the cake bigger, with which no one can quarrel, but where that growth comes from and where it is taking the ‘sectors’ and the people within them. The model is not sensitive to employment and yet there are ideas that have been technically worked out by women economists where growth and employment can be safeguarded even under a liberalized economic regime.<sup>23</sup>

They have placed the question of *Who benefits?* at the centre and said that the answer has to be the least privileged, the most deprived. This has to be the goal of all policies and theories. The question therefore will cease to be whether poor people would be better off when the economy grows but rather whether *growth produces the most dramatic and lasting reduction in human poverty*. History shows that it does not. A key lesson from the pursuit of gender equality is that one should not assume that what works for men will automatically benefit women. That lesson applies equally to the assumption that the poor will benefit in a fair way from aggregate growth; as it is now being pursued.

There has to be a search for some solutions to the problem of production and distribution of food and one of the roads proposed for resolving these problems is the local self government institutions in India, the Panchayat Raj, or local council institutions. It is argued that if enough food grains including pulses and vegetables and milk are produced within the community or within the particular areas<sup>24</sup>; if water harvesting is done within an area, if area planning is such that basics like water and food production are incorporated into and the growing of which is made into the area’s development plan, if employment guarantee schemes are linked to that production plan, such plans might produce a desirable form of economic development. If area planning could be such that it aims at improving agriculture output, not at the national level but at the area level with a focus on the nutritional content of production, the production /consumption cycle could generate the kind of economics that will be workable. Many such ideas have been put forth, and India with its decentralized governance, with affirmative action for women, is finding this to be a creative solution.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ed by Nilüfer Çağatay, Diane Elson, and Caren Grown. Irene van Staveren

<sup>23</sup> Stephanie Seguino and Caren Grown. A Feminist-Kaleckian Macroeconomic Policy for Developing Countries The Levy Economic Institute of Bard College Working Paper No. 446 May 2006.

<sup>24</sup> For Women To Lead --Ideas And Experiences From Asia: Study On The Legal Political Impediment To Gender Equity In Governance. A Study Sponsored By Management And Governance, UNDP New York 1997

<sup>25</sup> Planning at the Grassroots Level: An Action Programme for the Eleventh Five Year Plan Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India March 2006 New Delhi

Conventional wisdom often recommends sweeping one-size-fits-all solutions that invade the national policy space and inhibit tailor-made approaches. But we have learned that through the provisioning of new knowledge, which basically meant not only undermining existing knowledge, but also introducing new ideas for the very methodology of construction of knowledge, for challenging the legitimacy of the construction and propagation of the “great design”: “the single solution”, we can build a better road forward.

The knowledge journey became in my opinion, both - self empowering, and the major tool for influencing “the other” through the political campaigns of the women’s movement for establishing that complex goal of “equal but different”.

## Section VI

**Some proposals on where we can forge and strengthen our solidarity, and launch our commitment to a more equality creating growth path.**

**To suggest that participation, for excluded groups, for the poor is most valuable when it is engaged in politics.** The heart of the women’s question lies in gender-relations; the inequality in power, in autonomy between men and women; and to redress this inequality/lack of autonomy for women is contingent on their political presence - their visibility – in conventional politics. (This was also strongly affirmed in Beijing in 1995 by the World Wide Women’s Movement).<sup>26</sup>  
<sup>27</sup>

We argued in Casablanca for a strong political move by women **to reclaim Democracy and Development** through the mobilisation of those engaged locally, through the concept of the inverted pyramid, and the concept of *think locally and act globally* (not the other way around), spreading wide, or bubbling up to become a tidal wave at the macro or global level.

By identifying ourselves with justice and equality, or as Faye Harrison has said (*In equality*), with the down trodden as Gandhi would say, or the discriminated against and the hungry, by having a vision, as most of the feminists we reviewed have argued, as super ceding all the challenges to forging identity, like woman or race, we may be able to build our voice.

To challenge androcentric and eurocentric knowledge: Rebuilding knowledge together is a bonding process that I think has scope for solidarity

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<sup>26</sup> Conference Journeys: What Have We Not Done? Were Have We Gone Wrong? CONGO Presentation Jun. 2000

<sup>27</sup> The Beijing conference, namely the fourth world women’s conference (1995) drew particular attention to the neglect of women in political structures all over the world and the importance of bringing women into political structures. [1995, UNDP Human Development Report]. This report has excellent data world wide showing that world wide women have very little share in political processes – whether it is political parties, Parliaments etc.

On the contrary, women have always been very active in politics, if politics is taken to be the broader theatre of struggle for rights. For example, women have been very prominent in freedom struggles Therefore it is not for lack of political consciousness that women are not in politics, - but they have not been given the opportunity to translate the consciousness into what is called formal political expression.

## Where we do we go with our collective voice

*We have to find spaces – old and new, to keep on at this goal of budging and overturning existing macroeconomic policies and I suggest that*

1. We carry our ideas into the **[Non Aligned Movement] configuration**. I would like to point to the relevance of the **NAM**, as an umbrella for safeguarding women's interests and changing the world order, building peace into globalization.

NAM has been seen in its literal meaning, as being a neutral space, separating itself from the cold war adversaries, the East, socialist, and the West, liberal or capitalist. Two powerful blocs that have faded. Therefore it is argued that it is irrelevant in the new world order, where those blocs do not exist ...

But this was not only what NAM worked and stood for. NAM was a rallying call superceding all differences, for liberation from both colonial and other, such as ideological, domination. NAM was a movement for claiming sovereignty for the newly liberated nations to design their future from their own history, culture and economic landscapes. Sovereignty and liberation were the key words.

The NAM was a strong and supportive presence, though physically invisible, in the UN conferences on women. Its attention to women's contributions to economic development was sparked by the UN's International Women's Year. The Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries that was held in Lima in August 1975, which took place right after the Mexico City conference, strongly supported and reiterated the Plan of Action, the document that emerged from the Mexico conference. This support was reaffirmed in the many conferences that followed, including the Fifth Summit Conference of Heads of State of Government of Non-Aligned Countries in Colombo in 1976 and the Conference of Foreign Ministers of Non-Aligned Countries in Belgrade in 1978.

The NAM passed a series of resolutions on the issue of economic development in succeeding conferences, culminating in its Conference of Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries on the Role of Women in Baghdad in 1979. Representatives from forty-five developing nations attended the conference, and the UN sent observers from the ILO, ECWA, the UNDP, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the WHO. As a result of dialogues in conference venues, the NAM saw women's role in development as an international and political issue, in contrast to its earlier conceptualization of issues relating to women's status as social or cultural phenomena.

The NAM consultations introduced a more nuanced understanding of concepts that had seemed fairly straightforward, for example the idea of discrimination. Delegates from developing countries saw discrimination as "part of a system of exploitation in every country as well as within the international economic and political order." In contrast, delegates from developed countries tended to see it only in the context of male dominance.

By the time of the UN's Mid-Decade Review Conference in Copenhagen, (1980) the movement's analysis of women in development had sharpened to a complex understanding of "the interconnection between trends in women's roles and status in their societies and the nature and pattern of the development processes, including the latter's dependence on international, economic, and political relations."1. This model of development grew from a deep understanding of the realities of women's lives in developing countries

The conference report stated that "the inequality of women in most countries stems to a very large extent from mass poverty and general backwardness of the majority of the world's population caused by underdevelopment which is a product of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and also of unjust international economic relations." This was a very different statement than the one in the report of the Mexico City conference just five years before, which had focused on equality with men through legal means.

The current situation of the impact of globalization with special emphasis on expanding trade, on women reveals the need for the NAM movement to once again see the role of women, as principal actors, agents in the economic field, and to give special attention to that identification. There is a case again for NAM, for bringing collective action and institutions to protect, for example women migrants who are moving even within the South as the Multi nationals rove from one poor country to another looking for cheaper and cheaper labour, and less and less rigorous laws. NAM can collectively enforce a common set of negotiating principles, for outsourcing and other put out work, so that this race to the bottom can be stopped.

We now have a chance to introduce this strategy at the NAM Ministerial Meeting on Gender and Advancement of Women that is to be held in 2008. There is need to flag a theme and I suggest that we all, as organisations, individuals and groups press our respective government to take up one of these themes: a set that has been designed by the Casablanca group

*Women's Work: Perspective for South-South Cooperation Which will also give us a model for re-measuring*

*OR Enhancing Women's Role in South-South Economic Cooperation*

*OR Women sustain development with growth*

- Women's work in my view will include
  - the fact women's work is undervalued, in national accounts; thus measures of economic growth and development need to be revised to account properly for women's status and contribution
  - the fact that more women are now getting absorbed in the new growth path but on increasingly punishing terms thus women need to be included in decision making with a view to effecting legislation that prevents such exploitation
  - The fact that it is women who are migrating for work again under increasingly difficult terms is an issue that is being flagged in the Putrajaya document of the NAM meeting on women
  - The fact that new institutions for south south.cooperation, trade agreements within the South and with the North, and price-setting negotiations therein, do not

include women, and will continue to foster the distortions we have illustrated unless women are given sufficient participation

However that cooperation model today whether it is regional trade agreements or setting prices in the negotiation with the North does NOT include the view of women

2. Another space for reform and intervention is the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations. To change the realities for women, we have to be there where the decisions are being made and the conversation about what is possible in the world is being held. Some of those decisions, and part of that conversation is being held at the United Nations. If women are not there, the decisions will be made without us, and we will be worse for that.. So for example at the CSW, the work programme has been set for 2007-2009 at the 50<sup>th</sup> session; and there is no possibility to change this – the priority theme for 2008 is "Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women". The bureau has also not yet decided what the *emerging issue theme* will be. Here again if we can lobby for the themes mentioned above we will be able to intervene and force focus to the fact that we are constructing a new paradigm
3. While traditionally we feminist economists have tried to lobby and hold the World Bank and IMF accountable – another significant and powerful institutional space that has tremendous potential is the International Criminal Court. A vivid example of the possibility of international jurisprudence as an instrument to advance the cause of women is the far-reaching judgments produced by the International Judicial Tribunals (namely the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia -ICTY and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda – ICTR) that declared rape and sexual crimes committed against women in conflicts and wars as war crimes. Now the idea is to employ the ICC not only for “human rights offences” in the traditional sense but to also explore how far international law could also be drawn on to in some sense, to ‘call attention or punish crimes against humanity, including crimes against the poor and crimes against the environment’. A build up can be made around this just as the South countries made a build up into WTO the Doha round etc. to see how far corporates and governments which are targeting environment and within it those who are impoverished can be brought to book under crimes against humanity.
4. Within our own nations the national machineries and the Bureaus of Women Affairs. These bureaucratic structures which include several other institutions allied to them, like National Commissions on Women, have to some extent, been overtaken by the overall thrust of the global political economy. They are still engaged with protective legislation under the welfaristic mode, while their constituency, namely women, have moved from being objects of welfare, even though that still persists, into becoming major economic agents, but vulnerable. There is need to reconstruct the “women support” spaces, with more emphasis on self generated collective voice, as done by SAWID (South African Women In Dialogue <http://www.sawid.co.za/>) - which is truly inspirational.

We need to move from the modest ambition of being heard, to the subversive endeavour of plotting a different course for civilization.

I applaud you on your intentions and brilliance and thank you for listening to me.