

## Casablanca Dream III

September 10th 2008

A draft note on

### PURPOSE

from Devaki Jain and Shubha Chacko

Please comment react and reframe this paper over the next four weeks so we know where we are heading before we meet, and can organize the sessions towards that goal or goals

#### 1. The thrust

This quest on which we are engaged, on what is now the UNDP project, called *Assessing Development Paradigms through Women's Knowledge*, is to harvest our knowledge, which of course we all know, comes from our lived experience and engagement with feminists and feminism, in order to address the burning questions of to day, with the intention of constructing OR reframing, the underpinnings and the agendas of "*politics*".

While retaining a strong and political thrust we will unpack and rebuild *the concept of progress*. *Progress* is often flagged as indubitably desirable as a goal. Progress of nations, of humans / people, of science, -the list can be limitless. It has a normative value of movement, and is mesmerizing in its universal appeal. However *the underlying politics* that inform this "progress project" is the broad subject of our interrogation.

The term *politics* is being used in its broadest sense, not only as power play, but to include the ethical and epistemological underpinnings; to embrace all the dimensions of struggles for emancipation, for justice; to include the diverse or many elements we work with, namely history, economy, society, and institutions. As feminists we have seen and understood that almost all actions and view points or perceptions arise out of a politics, embedded hierarchies of thought, perception, power and action. Hence *politics*, in my view embraces these dimensions,

- and of course we *welcome you to challenge, modify re frame all of this*.

But if you like the umbrella concept, then we would give what we hope will be the outcome of this colloquium, a name, namely,

*The politics of economic justice : feminist explorations*

And the broader heading and the specific quest as

*Interrogating and Rebuilding Progress: Through Feminist Knowledge*

By drawing on the work, knowledge and experience of feminists, coming not only from varied geographical spaces, but also from a variety of knowledge spaces, the hope is to identify “other” ways of stimulating economic growth, ushering in prosperity, economic justice. “Other” obviously implies and suggests that the current ways of generating the growth of GDP, measuring prosperity, well being, progress, and/or offering an economic, social or political development program is flawed. ,

In other words, to repeat, the underlying assumption of the quest is that the current programs or projects or approaches that seek to usher in progress are often linked with various kinds of undesirable outcomes, notably the exacerbating of inequality, impoverishment and environmental devastation.

**2. The basic question that the Casablanca process seeks to answer, in our view is**

*How should a framework in development theory and practice respond to this new world with special reference to enabling women in poverty to walk out of it?*

Can we build do able ideas, based on our analysis .- rather than teasing of concepts, or unpacking of phenomena such as globalization ?

This initiative, process has been christened as the **Casablanca dream**, by my most brilliant feminist friend, Fatema Mernissi .of Morocco. She was with me; when 20 years ago, before the Nairobi Conference we worked together to challenge the existing development framework. and presented an alternative by DAWN, the third world network <sup>1</sup>

But what is needed now and it can be done if women put their minds together is for women’s brilliant struggles, to be treated as a BODY of knowledge, chiseled into **theory**, into an intellectual challenge to what “is” i.e. the currently dominant social science theories / ideas .An argument or a reasoned framework, which can claim **space** in the world of theoretical discourse.. A new Das Kapital or Wealth of Nations, as a bomb that can explode the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Bangalore Report – A Process for Nairobi at Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi, 1984

patriarchal mind set and exclusion of the real agency and value of women, in public policy.

Looking around in the world, there are many many other places from which a similar concern about a turbulent world , not necessarily responding to the feminist concerns, are being voiced..They ranged from what we call mainstream like Davos<sup>2</sup> , and the World Bank, to think tanks like the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation in Sweden (who are working on a project entitled “What next”)<sup>3</sup> or The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)<sup>4</sup> Society for International Development or South Asian Networks like SANGAT<sup>5</sup> and of course at the ground level where resistance and death are saying the same thing, *on this phenomena, of economic boom coupled with increase in inequality and unrest* . In every case, interestingly, the term, *idea* has become the language. Hence to generate and ride on the curve of *the power of ideas*.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Underlying premises

There are several **underlying premises** or hypotheses to this pursuit

1. that feminist understanding of humanity, that feminist methods of knowledge construction,[intersectionality] that women’s experience of discrimination and inequality ,womens’ rebellions , provide a fountainhead , to refresh the quest for a less harsh and oppressive macro space .
2. that the fundamentals on which the dialogues on current crisis ,whether in economy or governance or society , are based are flawed . For example the notion of progress, its measures-, both quantitative and qualitative. The theorems , such as free trade and global markets are the best stimulus for maximizing the human and physical resources, towards a just society .And so many more
3. that the way feminist researchers, governments, international agencies ,donors have tried to address , - what I would like to call women’s quest for equality and justice, in relation to macro economic initiatives or policies , development cooperation- are flawed and we need to rethink and find other tools and strategies

---

<sup>2</sup> Introducing the theme of the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Jan 2007, “The Shifting Power Equation , Mr. Schwab urged participants to help shape a global agenda that addresses a world that is rapidly changing: “ we are living in an increasingly schizophrenic world, where economies are booming and global signs are promising but underneath are economic, political and social risks, as well as imbalances and inconsistencies (as quoted by Vidya Subrahmaniam “Snow, Prosperity and Political Correctness” The Hindu 25/01/2007 Pg 13)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dhf.uu.se/whatnext/>

<sup>4</sup> [Gender and Development: Women Reinventing Globalisation](#) In search of an alternative development paradigm: Feminist proposals from Latin America Members of the Feminist Initiative of Cartagena

<sup>5</sup> Dina M Siddiqi and Malathi de Alwis Feminist Activism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Challenges and Prospects Report of the South Asian Feminist Meet July 25-29 2006 Sri Lanka

<sup>6</sup> Henry Hardy (ed) London: Pimlico 2001

4. that we need to shift our voice from what has been a special feature of the feminist movement , i.e. activism, grassroots experience , campaigning to, **challenging ideas** and replacing them. Our argument with the *Other* , is usually drawn from what has emerged from our lived experience, often located in the domain of the biological. We need to shift it to the intellectual .

Hence the suggestion , that drawing on, learning from, struggle and grassroots activism , transform that learning into ideas, arguments in economics, politics, governance .

#### 4. Process thus far

The forthcoming meeting in Casablanca in October is one more milestone in a process that I have been involved with since 2000 , which I have delineated, with Shubha's support, in the note called Milestones .It reveals that this is not a one off- it has been brewed and strengthened by many persons and organizations , large and small consultations with what is broadly called the women's movement , for all of the last 8 if not ten years, and it is something that is cooking in many feminist minds and groups world wide . It is a tribute to the energy , the struggles, the idealism and the experience of women – our knowledge pool (Please see Annex 2 of the Document entitled Milestones)

At our last get together in Istanbul , [ *see milestones paper 2for details* ]we outlined some of the challenges/crises that we face and listed about **eight of them** . These were inequalities between classes, countries, gender, ethnic groups , and rural and urban populations, the persistence of and exacerbation of various forms of deprivation, the assault on the environment due to market and consumer driven life styles, the revival of conservative expressions of culture , the increase of risk for labour, and the crisis of care, of finance for development, corruption of the State.

And in seeking out ways of meeting these challenges, we wanted to build or arrive at what could be called a feminist sustainable development model drawing on women's knowledge We framed it in the language of imagination, which resonates dreams which in fact , as Fatema taught us, is reality, the carpet on which we sit , the ground .

We suggested to ourselves that we need to **reimagine**, and listed more than **nine** such items .These were modernization, measures , the state, deprivation and poverty, knowledge ,validating and liberating indigenous knowledge, Justice,,Identity, Security...

Right through this reconstruction and reimagining we wanted to bring in illustrations from national experience which have begun to make the kinds of innovation needed such as Cambodia( labour standards) Morocco,(solar

energy)etc. but also voices, stories experiences in social mobilization for transformation.

Experiences and voices of women would be the critical knowledge from which the reimagining would take place and there would be a section on reimagining the women's movement.

## 5. The present

**The current project , which the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Team, Bureau for Development Policy, has agreed to support, involves the following steps**

- The individual thinkers contributing papers that will speak to the concerns outlined in the background given below.
- The next process step will be to have the drafts of papers ready by Sept 30<sup>th</sup> to be circulated within the group and to the other authors for comment.
- A doc which introduces the persons to each other , and another which traces the journey so far, called milestones and a purpose paper which tries to give a clearer mission to the project [the present doc ] circulated in September **for comment , modification**
- The colloquium in Casablanca will discuss the ideas from the papers and attempt a composite doc , which outlines a new or another approach to macro policies and their theoretical underpinnings .
- A synthesis paper that draws on the main issues will be prepared to intervene in operational spaces that we wish to influence through UNDP, for Doha meeting on financing Development in November 2008, and for the meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2009.
- The synthesis papers will also be resonated by sharing , these ideas with the various networks and assemblies of women – international meetings, local meetings , political arrangements like the NAM, regional arrangements like the trade agreements , WTO, etc and placed on the Casablanca web site .
- It is also hoped to publish a book out of the papers and discussions (Please see the Annexure)

## Annexure

### Background

#### 1. Notions of Progress

The idea of progress has shaped public policy and personal aspiration in many ways in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The document/book seeks to explore the conceptual definitional and substantive ways of understanding or interpreting/measuring progress and their limitations; and to rebuild the concept and content of progress in terms of social justice.

In our estimation progress has been primarily understood as “development” (a term brought in widespread use under the aegis of the UN and replaced the discourse of emancipation and liberation that marked the anti-colonial struggles) by a “ modernization, economic growth, a catching up in a linear fashion by adopting a model patterned on Western capitalist economies, increase in quantity and range of consumer products. Commercialization, urbanization and industrialisation has been seen as important ways of achieving progress. Social and economic justice has not been centrestage. And its achievement has been viewed as a hope-for by-product of economic growth and investment in the so-called social sectors.

The contributors will address these questions from their particular domains of knowledge and experience

#### 2. Measures of Progress

Many measures seem to indicate **apparent progress**

- Progress has been measured in terms of economic growth, and a variety of other economic and social indicators. Such as those proposed in the HDR and the MDGs. Many of these indicators show apparent progress

For instance In some regions rapid Economic growth such as Asia – particularly in the East and S.E. Asia and now China and India.

In many countries reductions in Infant Mortality, Increases in life expectancy, increases in literacy and other educational attainments as documented in the HDRs.

In many countries an improvement in the indicators in the status of women. These include striking gains in elections to local and national government bodies, and in entering public institutions; girls' access to primary education

has increased and women are entering the labor force in larger numbers; access to contraception is much more widespread; gender equality has been mainstreamed in some countries into law reform processes and statistical measures; and violence against women has been recognized as a human rights issue and made a crime in many countries. As documented in UNIFEM reports on the progress of women and the Beijing +10 reviews that were undertaken by various UN agencies, governments and women's organisations

There has been improvement in the statistical tools to measure specific dimensions of progress but there are still problems of missing the reality of the bigger picture of the kinds of societies that are being created. This is true of the MDGs which provide goals and targets which do not elaborate a vision of the kind of society or economy that is intended to be created. There is a danger that the MDGs miss the whole by emphasizing or dealing with the parts. There is no overarching vision of the kind of society that is needed to achieve social justice.

At the moment the kind of progress we are seeing are embedded in the creation of market societies, in which people are valued in terms of their profitability; in terms of what they can earn and consume rather than as human beings.

Despite improvements the dominant measures of progress are money-metrics such as GDP, Per Capita Income, Poverty Lines and expressed in money income per day or month.

These money-centred measures reflect the dominant view of progress.

### **3. Critique of Progress**

The apparent progress is subject to many limitations and fall short of the benchmark of the UDHR and the covenants that have stemmed from it. Covenants that countries have ratified and thereby accepting these standards and binding themselves to achieve.

Progress for some, has come at the price of violent dispossession of land and other resources. The "violence of development" is inherent in rationale of the market-driven capitalism.

Progress has been uneven. Inequalities have grown between and within countries. While poverty rates have fallen in some countries in others there have been increases and the over all number of people in poverty has increased. While more women are in waged labour market gender wage gaps persist

In some regions there have been reversals in the achievements. For instance life expectancy has fallen in the former Soviet Union and last parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Women in former centrally planned economies have lost access to state provided child care.

Progress is often insecure as people are more exposed to market risks; with the withdrawal of the state from the provision of public services and the enforcement of social standards in markets. Rise in farming prices may move farmers over the poverty line in one year but next year the falling prices may push them back down again.

**Hollow:** Longer hours of work...deterioration of working conditions and the promotion of ideas of satisfaction as linked to consumption of commodities.

Women in the labour market in greater numbers but the jobs they are in are often insecure and at the bottom of the pile etc. Women encouraged to commodify themselves.

Democratic deficits - Displacement of peoples identity as citizens with rights by an identity as consumers with purchasing power.  
Erosion of collective institutions. Restructuring of the state to actively promote and safeguard interest of private business.

### *Unsustainable*

Ecologically unsustainable: Commodification and despoliation of nature( climate change water shortage, food shortage, the energy shortage),  
Socially unsustainable: violence, wars both communal ethnic deprivation and inequality induced breakdown of democracy Construction of new forms of collectivities around narrow and exclusive identities.

## **4 Rebuilding progress /rebuild concepts measurement method**

- Our starting point is not to abandon the idea of progress. We recognize the value of aspiration to a better life. It is necessary to refresh and rebuild the idea of progress recognizing that progress is multifaceted and complex and often contradictory.
- Recognizing the diversity of women's lives and opinions, the plurality of their presence or the identity ...the content of progress has to respond to this diversity , and the contours of progress responding to this , needs to be built up , bottoms up , different ways from different places

- **Rebuild it** – Women’s movements have continually challenged and sought to transform understanding of progress, based on their lived experiences of being at the cross-roads of production and social reproduction. We recognize that there have been other valuable critiques of progress from diverse stand points - socialists, Gandhian, human development, ecological, human rights. However the concerns of poor women has not be placed at the centre of the analysis and women have not been treated as persons in their own right.
- We seek to build on previous effort to move it forward to address the contemporary challenges. We aim to produce a critical rethinking of concepts measures and methods of achieving progress. With a particular focus on political economy and the material conditions of life and social justice.