

A Note Emerging From Reflection in Casablanca

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1. Findings

- 1.1. Ten leading women thinkers, of the fifteen invited along with some others, who could also be called women leaders, also having a track record of engaging in public policy domains, - local, national and international; who represent a diversity of experience ranging from feminist scholarship to international law and international economics and heads of UN Development agencies - met in Casablanca to reflect on the state of the world with special reference to what has been recognized, even at Davos (The World Economic Forum) on January 24-25, 2007, as the increasing distance between the rich and the poor¹ as well as the *shifting* global power landscape from the “early birds”, the North countries to the “new arrivals” such as the new big five, China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico as underlined by the German Chancellor in her Opening Address at Davos.²
- 1.2. The intention of the meet at Casablanca reflected this growing concern, which has also been echoed in a number of recent high profile books like that by Joseph Stiglitz³ as well as the major review that had been prepared by Devaki Jain (with assistance from Shubha Chacko taking note of over 100 documents – international, national, academic etc.) that formed the background for the meeting.
- 1.3. The group not only considered women’s experience of development in the developing countries, but also the analysis and proposals that were emerging from those within the ‘club of women thinkers’ on the trends, and how and where responses were necessary.
- 1.4. The first important finding that was flagged was that there were also many **other shifts**; in power and location, taking place. For example, the nature of economic activities especially in the fast growing export earning sectors, is found to be shifting from what used to be called the factory floor, i.e. firms of one kind, to other spaces such as homes, and small workshops. Broadly this kind of shift is known and recognized as a shifting from the formal economic organizational structures to the ‘informal’. Lourdes Beneria,⁴ has spoken of this *shift* in terms of risk - which has moved from employer to worker.⁵ There are other such *shifts* too, adding to vulnerabilities of the poor. *Shifting* of state responsibility for what can be called the well being of its citizens. The public-private partnership, the assumption that competition creates efficiency in implementation, in use of natural resources, has started the process of privatisation of even public goods. Water, land, health, services, nutritional programmes, which used to be part of the welfare package, is now gradually being shifted into the profit making zone.
- 1.5. The second important finding which has come out in fairly widely accepted journals⁶ is resounding evidence that the distribution of wealth is highly concentrated — “in fact much more concentrated than the world distribution of income, or the distribution of

wealth within all but a few of the world's countries.”⁷ And that, **income inequalities** are also increasing, therefore the argument that mere growth cannot be relied on to reduce poverty.

- 1.6. The third significant trend with its broad implications is the liberalization programme, the **free flow of capital**, the opening up of borders to attract international investment, the increasing importance of the Information Technology (IT) sector which in turn has given extraordinary opportunities to countries with low labour cost but a reasonably broad spectrum of educated citizens. This has brought a new dimension to globalisation.
- 1.7. One of the phenomena that has been the striking outcome of this movement of capital, (based on the argument of improving productivity and efficient use of factors of production derived from the old free trade theory), is that it has increased and also changed the nature of **migration**. There is hardship migration of those whose vocations are not able to provide even a minimum sense of well being and therefore distress migration. Distress migration is also due to conflict. There is another form of migration which trails behind corporates who are moving from country to country to seek improved facilities, both infrastructure as well as cheaper, less organized labour.
- 1.8. Finally, an increasing **risk to environment** is being sharply flagged in almost frightening proportions. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) volume of “Climate Change 2007”, also known as the Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) says it all. The UNDP Human Development Report of 2006 brings attention to the growing inequality in access to the world's water and sanitation. The Report entitled *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*, looks at water and sanitation as an essential human rights, a vast economic cost, and a cause of many social problems

2 Analysis

In analyzing the sources of some of the negative aspects of the current global trends and what could be some of the responses from what can be called the **knowledge and “knowing”⁸ of women**, their constituencies, their leaders, their departments in governments, to deal with the negative aspects of some of these phenomena; they came up with the following concerns/ideas.

2.1 That **increasing inequalities** were often, if not always, responsible for **conflict**. For example, an investigation done of conflict situations in the Philippines, which has been reported in the Philippines Human Development Report, revealed that the conflict emerged out of strong experience of inequality. The riots in Paris, also revealed the same cause. Thus they linked peace building to equality building, and argued that tackling or engaging in growth strategies which would not generate inequality, was crucial for reducing conflict, and building peace. Not only arms and armies and other “securities”.

2.2 Giving illustrations from Africa, Latin America, South Asia, on **the nature of the kind of impoverishment that was experienced by women in that last lowest decile** of the political economy; they suggested that deprivation was to include availability and access to basic survival needs such as water, health services, as well as preservation of their “knowing” such as the knowledge and self strength, “voice”. The deprivation of their rights is also evident in the violence that they face – at the workplace, in the public sphere and in the homes. Violence that has been amplified as a product of all the macro-economic forces- which erodes the protective mechanisms such as labour legislations that are in place and simultaneously unleashes new perils such as crossborder trafficking. The increased militarization and conflict situations around the world leads to sharp rise in the instance and forms of violence that women face – directly and indirectly. These are in addition to the numerous types of violence that poor women experience as a function of their poverty.

2.3 Their third suggestion was that the **conditions** under which women worked and their **location in the political economy**, needed to be made into a visible picture and countries, need to engage with this phenomena as an area for justice, just as they would engage with other forms of international law and networking, so as to inform public policy forums, whether it is the UN, the NAM, national governments or local governments.

2.4 While the meeting drew women with varied backgrounds and from different countries and revolved around the broad theme of women, peace and globalization. After the brainstorming we narrowed it to ***Getting the Fundamentals Right – Women, Water and Wealth***. The schema they suggested transliterates:

- “Women” includes the agency of women – as changemakers – as a domain (reexamining the women’s movement, women’s struggles and women’s machineries – women’s spaces);
- “Water” can be taken symbolic of a basic (or fundamental issue) that has political, social, economic, environmental, health and cultural ramifications – especially for poor women.
- “Wealth” would bring the basic macroeconomic paradigms into focus as well as issues of poverty and inequality.

The underlining argument was that there was a need to unpack the fundamentals – the constructs, the “knowing” and as they exist and concepts that inform policies and actions – from the basis of knowledge that women have provided they would be “reconstituted”.

3. Moving Beyond BPFA and MDGs

3.1 While understanding that the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals have played a critical role in making the issue of gender visible and offering frameworks to gauge progress; considering that the

globe has changed in significant ways - in its politics and its economics, its landscapes of institutions and laws, and its approaches and ideologies to transformation since Beijing (1995) and more dramatically since the opening of this 21st century,(see paras 1.4 to 1.7) it is suggested that the women's movement (especially of the South) would take note of the current scenario and **develop a new framework**, as identified at Casablanca , from which they would send the questionnaires to the states, to the national governments, so that the deliberations at the world conference could make a major difference to women in south countries, especially those trapped in poverty and deprivation of basic needs.

4. Suggestions

4.1 Some considerations **regarding the political economy** which emerged are

4.1.1 In designing the preparation for future conference (women's and others), **to draw upon the knowledge** on women workers in export oriented areas, be they, special export oriented industrial estates or even outsourcing, BPO's and migration, thus taking note of the current location of woman in the political economy of the globe, the nature of their work, the conditions of their work, the contribution of their work and then consider international legal covenants, which will enable them to avail of the opportunity without being in any way 'injured'.

4.1.2 To give value to **women's non monetised work**. Developing measures which would bring in women's "real" contribution. Giving visibility to women's contribution was an important suggestion and therefore again, a proposal that the UN system of national accounts needs to be recast.

4.1.3 The new increasing **female migration** has been highlighted by many documents,⁹ but as argued in Devaki Jain's paper for the NAM Summit, it would be a pioneering step and an important one the South countries to consider drafting a **self governing covenant** between the South countries, which would offer a certain kind of protection to females who are migrating from one South country to another.

4.2 Regarding **Institutional spaces**, some consideration could be given to the following *two institutions*:

4.2.1 One, the **Bureaus of Women Affairs**. These bureaucratic structures which include several other institutions allied to them, like 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 e.g. by SAWID (South African Women In Dialogue <http://www.sawid.co.za/>)

4.2.2 To see how far international law, especially since the setting up of the **International Criminal Court**; could also be used 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 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.

4.3 Regarding **fashioning new spaces**:

4.3.1 To follow a similar process in negotiating the relationship between women workers and the multinationals corporations as is done in the case of the bargaining and negotiations between countries, for regional cooperation or trade agreements or political agendas, or which is undertaken for agricultural products and other issues. It is important for the South countries to form a **consolidated front**, in dealing with MNCs –rather than that they deal with individual countries. A broad based front would prevent exploitation and enhances opportunities. Again, the debtor’s forum which was proposed by the South Commission as a form of offering a front, a club which can be built on solidarity for negotiating debt – can be recalled. Similarly, there can be a South-centred club for negotiating the travelling of the international capital for the creation of products and services.

4.3.2 For the South countries to together **pressure global institutions** that have direct influence on national decision-making on vital issues such as privatization of water .

4.3.3 To provide **unencumbered, non institutional space** for local women’s groups to engage with each other in dialogue across difference, in order to propose a unified set of advise and advisories to national governments. The institutionalization of what is called the civil society into registered NGOs, international NGOs, the NGO as an actor, was examined critically by the group. Dialogue across difference, spaces for grassroots women to engage with others and create a solidarity front where the consensus emerges through dialogue was seen as one more shift from the traditional separation of institutions into government and non-government. This would make way for the ‘women’s movement’ to be involved in all the major conferences, critically, on behalf of their less privileged sisters, whether trapped in poverty or trapped in conflict situations.

4.3.4 To institute, a **women’s advisory check** rather like the environmental clearance that is now mandatory for major projects, but the women’s check has to

be very specifically from the point of view of women in deprivation. In other words, the social category has to be identified, since women were not homogenous category.

¹ Introducing the theme of the 37th annual, "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)

² "We must realize that only a unified G8 approach can help persuade the emerging economies, with their dynamic economic growth, to join us in our shared global responsibility. Therefore my aim is for Germany's G8 Summit, in Heiligendamm in June, to place special emphasis on new forms of dialogue with the major emerging economies, i.e. Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa. The Summit will initiate that dialogue and pass it on to other international organizations because we need a coherent, joint approach in the many international bodies." (Opening Address by Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, at the World Economic Forum on 24 January 2007 in Davos

http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Speeches_Interviews/January/0124BKinDavos.html)

³ Making Globalization Work, WW Norton, September, 2006 Penguin Books, August 2006

⁴ Professor of City and Regional Planning, and Women's Studies; Director of International Studies in Planning Program Cornell University, USA

⁵ Shifting the Risk: New Employment Patterns, Informalization, and Women's Work Lourdes Beneria, International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Issue Volume 15, Number 1 / September, 2001

⁶ Examining Inequality: Who Really Benefits from Global Growth? Peter Edwards World Development Vol.34 No.10 pp 1667-1695 2006

⁷ James B. Davies, Susanna Sandstrom, Anthony Shorrocks, and Edward N. Wolff *World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University (UNU-WIDER) the World Distribution of Household Wealth* December 2006

⁸ Devaki Jain, Background Note for Casablanca, "*Invoking Gyana, Women's knowing, as a vehicle for rebellion*", January 12-15, 2007, Morocco

⁹ See for example Ndioro Ndiaye's (Deputy Director General Of The International Organization For Migration - IOM) Presentation on the Situation And Contributions Of Migrant Women Bridging The Gaps Throughout The Life Cycle UNFPA-IOM Expert Group Meeting Female Migrants: New York, 2 May 2006