

# Re-thinking Africa

A Contribution to the Swedish Government White Paper on Africa

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## Purpose

The Swedish government has in its budget proposal to parliament for 2007 announced its intention to submit a White Paper on Swedish relations with Africa. The previous White Paper on this subject, “Africa on the Move”, was submitted in March 1998, a revised and shorter version in 2002. The White Paper is intended as a basis for the formulation of Swedish government policies toward Africa, not only regarding development cooperation but also in trade, security, cultural exchange and other areas of particular Swedish interest. Work commenced in the spring of 2007, a first draft shall be available by 1 November 2007, and final submission is expected by December 2007. The project is being coordinated within the Africa Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The White Paper will highlight new developments in Africa as well as other trends of relevance to Swedish relations with the continent. It will explore how these trends affect Sweden and how Sweden may position itself in relation to them. It will discuss changes of relevance not only to Swedish bilateral relations with Africa but also to Swedish involvement in EU and UN initiatives. Its point of departure will be the existing Swedish policy for global development. The White Paper will focus on Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as a whole and will not describe developments in individual African countries or sub-regions other than for purposes of illustration.

Background material for the White Paper will consist of five papers commissioned from external writers by the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, researchers at the Nordic Africa Institute as well as a set of shorter, non-formal thematic papers mostly written within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The five papers cover the following areas:

- The “New Africa”
- Natural resources – assets and vulnerability
- Human resources
- Demography
- Economic growth

This is the first of these five papers written by researchers at the Nordic Africa Institute. Following an introduction with highlights from the current academic debate on changes in Africa, the following sets of issues are reviewed:

- Rural poverty, agrarian change and the struggle for resources
- Urban dynamics: Poverty, information and transformation
- Conflicts, displacement and transformation
- Gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS
- Uneven globalization: Trade and regional integration

Finally, in a set of concluding remarks a macro-perspective on Africa, outlining global and national dimensions of the various road maps to “Africa’s renewal”, is applied.

## Introduction: What is new from Africa? (Quid novo ex Africa?)

In many societies in Africa dramatic changes are the order of the day. Scholars are currently debating both the character and impact of these changes, and also how they may be best understood. Concomitantly with changes on the ground, influencing daily lives of men and women, changes are also taking place on more conceptual levels regarding how to understand and how best to come to grips with what is actually going on. A new approach which tends to look at things from the points of view of African men and women themselves, and accordingly to focus on *agency* (not forgetting about structural constraints) is gaining ground. A new discourse on Africa is emerging, making it relevant to ask to which extent certain phenomena are actually new on the ground, and/or to which extent new questions and new conceptualizations reveal processes and forms of action previously neglected or misconstrued by prevalent forms of analysis.

Both concerns will be reflected in this paper: What is new on the ground, and how can these changes in and of African societies be best understood? To what extent are new conceptualizations able to capture and explain trends and configurations, new or old, which previously passed unseen?

One of the manifest changes in any African country – as a specifically African edition of “globalization” – is the overwhelming presence of development aid. Wherever you go or travel on the continent (maybe with the exception of South Africa) you see the robust (and expensive) 4x4 vehicles of NGOs and development organizations. African societies are embedded in the socio-economies of Western aid and development programmes and both political and economic actors adhere to the whims of donor countries. Development aid is not an add-on to African societies; aid is part and parcel of African modern life. State representatives have been quick to pick up development parlance and lines of thinking, and the same is true of employees of local NGOs – as well as of young men and women. Learning the correct humanitarian, or development aid lingo has become a strategy of many young people as aptly put by a young Sierra Leonean: “the aid business is my business”.<sup>1</sup>

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### Second government

In order to understand current processes in Africa it is important not to underestimate the effects of the presence of international NGOs and donor agencies on everyday lives. The social and economic activities, the public space they take (for instance in media and semi-academia), and the ‘moral’ agendas they stand for must be emphasized. Although heterogeneous in its setup it is correct to say that in many African countries they form a second government. There is a constant battle between them and the country’s real government over issues ranging from where to construct a water well in a village to how to run a ministry. Second government runs ministries in some countries today. The second government is everywhere and at times more efficiently so. Second government has no citizens, are not accountable to anyone in the country but to people outside. Although local ownership is high on the agenda of second government in reality

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<sup>1</sup> Coulter, Chris, “‘The aid business is my business’: Expectations of education and the humanitarian appeal to young men in war-torn Sierra Leone”, *Ethnos*, forthcoming.

locals needs to subdue their agendas and morph into victims-of-something to be eligible to aid. Being victim-of-something is the abstract citizenship of second government. People all over the continent reconstruct life stories of victimhood in order to become a citizen of second government and thus eligible to aid resources. *Victimcy* has been suggested as a concept to capture this conflation<sup>2</sup>.

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A keyword in the new discourse on Africa is *agency*. This focus on African agency is to some extent a polemical response to previously dominant trends of Afro-pessimism. Instead of looking at Africans as hapless victims, it makes more sense and opens more perspectives to focus on what is actually going on, how people do adjust, and how they do (if at all possible) *take advantage of* new and changing circumstances, be it dislocation, poverty or war. How do they proceed with their lives and act on their hopes and aspirations?

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### **Focus on *agency* highlights agility and adaptation**

There is little doubt that concentrating on agency forces us to (re)consider the main questions we've been asking since independence. Instead of raising the issue of why Africa has *not* developed, we are directed to consider the extraordinary ways in which Africans have adapted to a rapidly changing world order. [...] A focus on the adjustments Africans have had to make to these global influences brings out the ability of both rulers and peoples to grasp the opportunities available to them and deploy them to purposeful effect. A few examples will make the point. The agility demonstrated by African governments in maximising resource transfers within the radically different environments of the Cold War, structural adjustment and, today, rapid globalisation is truly impressive. Equally, the speed at which Africans deployed the discourse and instruments of democracy to force greater accountability on their governors is remarkable. On another register, the ease with which Africans have adapted to the spread of the mobile phone and the internet to facilitate commerce and migration is nothing short of astonishing. (Patrick Chabal 2007: 6)

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In this introduction we will comment on some of the main issues of contemporary Africa and critically examine the current state of affairs and developments, from different inroads, several with a focus on voices and viewpoints of African men and women, young and old. We will challenge old conceptualizations – such as for instance the tired dichotomies of rural/urban and tradition/modernity. We insist that it makes more sense to go beyond dichotomies and to try to carve out conceptualizations with which to grasp how lives in Africa (as elsewhere) are entangled, complicated and changing mixtures of rural, urban, old and new in unexpected combinations.

Interspersed in the introduction the reader will find topical textboxes aimed to underpin knowledge on certain processes. Some of these boxes are quotes from the work of others, some of them are quotes from papers produced by NAI researchers as a part of the preparation for this paper. The five sections which follow reflect some of the areas of research currently in focus at the Nordic Africa Institute. The introduction aims at pointing towards particularly pertinent issues in the sections that follow, to link them together and to place them in a common framework. In a concluding chapter, a macro-perspective on Africa is applied outlining global and national dimensions of the various roadmaps to “Africa’s renewal”.

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<sup>2</sup> Mats Utas 2005: *Victimcy, girlfriending, soldiering: tactic agency in a young woman's social navigation of the Liberian War Zone*, *Anthropological Quarterly* 78(2), 2005: 403-30.

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## **Old Africa images must be reconsidered**

Basically two types of Africa images have served as filters for the images of Africa maintained and reproduced in Europe, including Sweden:

- 1) A romanticizing image (the noble savage), “primitive” as unspoiled, rhythmic and sensual (the lost paradise).
- 2) The image of the underdeveloped, primitive in a negative sense, as something to deplore, and feel pity about.

Both images centre on us, our needs or our feeling of superiority. Now a new image is emerging, where for the first time Africans are no longer objects, but subjects. This is not a uniform Africa. It is time to leave behind the thinking of African nations as uniform entities, and take into account diverse histories, wealth in resources, and the different circumstances and opportunities shaped by various religions, by rural areas versus cities, men and women, young and old. It is time to recognize that cities are as much real Africa as the rural areas, and that it is here that one finds new creative and visionary expressions combining tradition and modernity.

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Ten years ago Africa looked different. Communication was a laborious exercise often involving the physical movement of people themselves. Today in most parts of the continent one will see city dwellers chatting on their mobile phones, checking e-mail and the latest international football updates at the internet café. Rebels in the DRC partly get their demobilization benefits sent to their mobile phones and currently companies are opening up mobile phone based banking systems. Certainly improved communication technologies have a wide range of effects in Africa. While mobile phones have eased connection between rural and urban communities and thus cut out a whole range of intermediaries such as letter writers and neighbours travelling home, it also gives new positions and possibilities to the people possessing a mobile phone. Not only do they communicate more freely themselves and thus sidestep figures of authority, they also control the communication of others dependent on their phones. Also the increased use of internet, discussion lists, blogs, etc. makes it possible for people in the diasporas to influence what is going on in their countries of origin by way of pushing for certain developments and preserving others. However, it is often forgotten that the high rate of illiteracy creates a serious barrier to accessing such technologies for a large part of the population, as do economic status and geographical location.

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## **Culture as communication**

Cultural creativity is developed in inspiration both from the past and from other communities and societies. Among intellectuals, cultural workers, and artists the narrow definition of national or continental authenticity is being replaced by a more open and self-confident style, where borrowing is not treason but a prerogative. Yet the conditions under which arts are created and distributed are very different from those in the North. Painters have to use whatever paints are available, musicians cannot always get hold of instruments or instrument parts, writers experience power cuts, film-makers become dependent on European companies for their long-film production etc. The market is diminishing in much of Africa, forcing artists to look to foreign markets to survive. In rare cases they get foreign funding to reach the markets at home. For mass media and literature, crisis-caused reduction of literacy is a handicap, despite the phenomenon of each relevant book or paper getting a readership of 10-20 times more than a Western paper or book.

The role of IT is growing in Africa. Some view IT in Africa as irrelevant, since the social gap between poor and rich makes Internet and e-mail inaccessible for many. While this is true, the conclusion should rather be to increase accessibility. Already, street kids use Internet cafés, contradicting the assumed correlation of means and accessibility. IT is used by artists, such as painters and sculptors, to sell their works, and has been (together with mobile phones) vital in monitoring encroachment of human rights. In other fields, notably the performing arts (theatre, dance, performing poetry, stand-up comedy, musical performances), the availability of spaces for performance is crucial.

With growing opportunities and opening spaces the search for new meanings of belonging is encouraged, and an African-national and at the same time global citizenship is facilitated.

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Improved technology has given the film and music industry in Africa a much greater impact in spreading political, social and cultural ideologies. Much of this production is local, i.e. African, and with considerably less influence from the Western powers than for example education and research. For your career you have to learn the Western lingo, but for your leisure time to be a non-Western, yet modern African is desired. The proliferation of Nigerian videos over all countries in West Africa is amazing, Nollywood is today the worlds largest filmproducing centre (followed by Bollywood and Hollywood). Equally African music, yet influenced by Western music, is currently preferred over its Western counterpart. In, for instance, Sierra Leone approximately 70-80% of music played on the radio is of Sierra Leonean origin and the bulk of the remainder is made in other West African countries. Donor lingo seems downplayed in this sphere of music and moving images, but religious ideologies are not. The ways globalization makes its impact in this particular sphere seem to be through Christianity and Pentecostal churches.

The donor focus on democratization ought to take African popular culture into consideration, but generally it does not. Often democratization is more of an abstract enterprise, centring on multi-party systems and national elections at regular intervals. Actual democratic processes on the ground are generally of less importance. Sometimes you get the feeling that even democratically elected leaders are not too keen on democracy on the ground. It cannot be granted that democratization (in terms of multi-party systems and regular elections) actually leads to a democratic society; on the contrary common fusing with patrimonial politics in the postcolonial state often leads to anti-democratic patterns. Gradual increased access to information (free media and the electronic information boom) is indeed of great importance. But even this access and communication possibilities do not in themselves lead to democratization. In two recent meetings of women's movements in Africa, the African Feminist Forum in Accra, Ghana, November 2006 and the Feminist Dialogues meeting in connection with the Social Forum in Nairobi, January 2007, issues of democracy and democratization were keenly discussed. Participants talked about the need to re-define "democracy" and to move from purely representative forms of democracy to more participatory ones. The women also identified current overarching dangers to democratization, such as "neo-liberal globalizations, in which religious fundamentalisms fuel and are fuelled by ever-increasing militarization".<sup>3</sup> A recurrent point in both meetings was that "a new

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<sup>3</sup> African Feminist Forum: Reclaiming Our Spaces, Executive Summary at [www.africanfeministforum.org](http://www.africanfeministforum.org), accessed March 2007.

democratic culture” must be based on bottom-up participation, and on social movements outside the parliamentary structures (see section 4).

To many Africans the state is only to a limited extent an organism that delivers protection, social benefits, rights and equal justice. And there are many examples where citizens regard and deal with the state with a sound proportion of distrust and in extreme instances view the state as an outright enemy of the people. Scholars who have analyzed the “African state” rather harshly talk about “the criminalization of the state” and point towards how the African state in recent times has gone from being a “Kleptocracy to the Felonious State”.<sup>4</sup> Others speak about a “shadow state... in which a realpolitik of thuggery and profiteering is conducted behind a façade of formal administrative respectability”.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly such processes place a wedge between state and citizens and create a vacuum of social distrust. Lack of trust between citizens and state is naturally a fundamental obstacle for any democratization process of depth.

There is a clear tendency to portray “traditional” Africa as adverse to modernization, democratic leadership, economic transparency and thus African development proper. However one must handle the tradition/modernity dichotomy with utmost care, and rather than apply it look for ways in which this conceptualization can be dissolved and undermined. Buying into the tradition/modernity dichotomy will obscure a proper understanding of culture as a continuous process, and furthermore play into the hands of politicians who use the dichotomy for their own purposes (see section 4). All important research shows that modern and traditional life styles cannot be separated or placed within hierarchies because changes are multi-directional and dynamic. Furthermore, sometimes so-called “traditional” forms of governance and of conflict resolution have more real democratic potential than so-called “modern” ones.

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### **Beyond dichotomies**

Recent work has shown the pointlessness of conceptualising African society in terms of a dichotomy between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’. [...] Some of the research suggests that in many complex ways the so-called ‘traditional’ forms are more effective at turning ‘democracy’ into a reality than the more formal institutional mechanisms presumed to ensure accountability. [...] Studying how communities in Africa have faced up to the issues of violence, justice and reconciliation points to variegated forms of so-called ‘traditional’ methods, which have in practice proved worthwhile. Ranging from the *gacaca* tribunals in Rwanda to the village-based cleansing ceremonies in Mozambique, there are on the continent numerous instances of informal methods by which communities address, deal with and resolve even the most unspeakable acts of violence or the most intractable causes of conflict. The interesting question here is precisely the overlapping of the formal and informal in a process of social and political transition that is firmly modern. (Patrick Chabal 2007: 7)

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When focus is on urban dynamics it is important to be aware of the ways in which cities are connected with rural regions through social networks between extended families stretched over several localities and through economic and political networks further

<sup>4</sup> Bayart, Jean-Francois, Ellis, Stephen and Hibou, Beatrice, *The criminalization of the state in Africa*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> William Reno (1995) in Comaroff, Jean and Comaroff, John, ‘Law and disorder in the postcolony: An introduction’. In *Law and disorder in the postcolony*. J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff (eds). (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2006), p. 16.

accentuating regional inequalities, some deriving from the colonial and pre-colonial politics. Additionally it is important to disaggregate the urban population; it does not make sense to talk about the urban elite without also talking about the urban poor and the middle class and without taking into consideration the elasticity and diversity within these categories (see sections 1 and 2).

If cold-war politics propped up autocratic leaders and sustained their kleptocratic mode of ruling, then a neo-liberal shift away from state to civil society was intended as a remedy to heal the wounds. Yet such efforts can be said to have had the effect of deregulation in many African states and the creation of a series of new conflicts and internal wars (see below and section 3). Furthermore it is evident that macro adjustment schemes far from succeeded in eliminating the cold-war type of leaders on the continent.

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### **Rhetoric changes, kleptocracies remain**

They [political leaders] have merely altered the sorts of resources and rhetoric at their command. Now organs of civil society and humanitarian aid, alike local and transnational, exist alongside the Mugabes of this world, who seize incoming assets and feed their clients in the name of majority rights, redistribution, and anti-imperialism. Kleptocrats may no longer draw succor from superpowers with geostrategic anxieties. But they do very well out of donor aid and no-questions-asked global commerce. (Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff 2006: 10)

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Africa is still a continent where international (mainly Western) economic actors reap huge business returns. In the so called *New Scramble for Africa* European economic interests, many both of colonial date and cut, have clashed with new players. As of recently the Chinese business endeavour in Africa has received ample attention. China has become a potent actor in the “new” Africa, along with other growing economies such as India and Brazil. Although it is clear that China in many places takes advantage of a disorganized legal sector and underpaid (and thus greedy) civil servants in order to obtain raw material at low cost and in exchange flood Africa with substandard products, it must also be pointed out that China’s bid on African products clashes with the traditional interests of the old colonial powers and a more general Western dominance in African trade (see sections 1 and 5). China is viewed as a threat to a Western order of things in Africa as much as elsewhere. While it is easy to discuss players in the guise of whole nations it is simultaneously clear that international corporations and smaller Western based businesses continue and extend their commerce in fashions hardly sustainable from an African point of view. For example the mining sector in most countries continues to give very few real revenues to African states and even less to their citizens (even if there are exceptions like South Africa and Botswana).

Increasingly important players are also INGOs and UN agencies who at times deal with annual budgets at the same levels as those of small African governments. International churches, Muslim associations and religious NGOs (both Christian and Muslim) are also currently increasing their political and economic powers – who could be called neo-missionaries as a continuation of classic missionary work in Africa. A general tendency is that both Christians and Muslims are leapfrogging from old mission churches and non-fundamentalist Islamic brotherhoods towards more extreme forms of religious congregations. The success of Pentecostal churches on the continent is momentous and a

case in point. Part of the success of such religious groups can be traced to the increasing importance of alternative moral communities to the lineage and the nation, alternative legal frameworks, as well as socio-economic security providers. As such the religious communities may be seen as part of the informalization of the state and creators, in some ways, of alternative, yet partial, structures complementing the neo-liberal state of concurrent Africa.

It is difficult to discuss African economy in a uniform way. Function and development vary considerably from region to region and from state to state. Great varieties are found within states as well. African economies have generally only to a limited degree been controlled by governments. This informalization of the economy increased when UN and Western development agencies moved their focus away through the state and towards the civil society. Currently we see a majority of Africans in most countries surviving through the informal sector (see section 2) and it is quite feasible that even an urban dweller can spend a whole life without being involved in any formal sector transactions. In most African states the economy thus remains governmentally unregulated. African production is still rural with very limited urban industrialization which implies that new techniques in agriculture remain of the utmost importance for African states. African dependency on agricultural exports is troublesome, especially as they are penalized by Western subsidies to their own farmers (see section 1). Despite the rural dominance in African economies urbanization remains rapid, yet there are tendencies of a slowing down (see section 2).

The 1990s was a period of increased internal warfare in Africa – Africa emerged as the conflict region par excellence. As noted above it was changes on the international political scene that unleashed this new string of local warfare. Although there are local issues at stake in all of these conflicts it is important to point out the interconnectedness and the continued globalities of these conflicts. International politics, economic interests and even humanitarian aid continue to fuel African conflicts in a variety of ways (see section 3).

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### **On the connectedness of so called “new wars” in Africa**

In the 1990s.... fierce civil wars caricatured as explosions of pent-up hatreds erupted around the world. It is true they were launched by local actors, but on playing fields heavily structured by a welter of global inputs: superpower disengagements, regional political rivalries, imposed adjustment plans, falling commodity prices, arms sales, illegal trade, NGOs, diasporas, the Internet and satellite hookups. The needs, aspirations and fears of local players were hooked to strings pulled from above. It should be painfully obvious that every corner of the “global war against terror” involves the inter-digitation of global alignments and local struggles. (R. Brian Ferguson, 2007: 5)

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As if brutal civil wars were not enough Africa has been struck hard by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and it is important to maintain an awareness of the magnitude of the pandemic and simultaneously highlight what access to inexpensive medication would mean to the whole continent. Yet it is also important to acknowledge how HIV/AIDS creates structural changes all over the continent (see sections 1 and 4).

Changing political agendas and donor driven structural change often aim towards general shifts in gender relations, yet it should be pointed out that agendas of the state have

limited powers to reach into the “real world” of people on the ground. NGOs with “women agendas” often find themselves equally out of step with a larger populace. The example of the popularity of the aggressive sexual masculinity of the politician Jacob Zuma in South Africa is a case in point (see section 4). Another example would be the local propping up of women’s organizations in the peace exercises in post-war Liberia. It is not being done because Liberians believe that women are better peace-makers than men, but simply because of their knowledge of the mental set-up of the donor community – in that way funding is secured.

Another pressing issue on the African agenda has been the issue of youth. The African demographic make-up makes for a particularly large group of young people. In many settings however youth is not a chronological issue but has rather turned into a social category of those who have not – of marginalization. In the pressing economic condition of many African states the youth category has kept growing as there are few ways out of poverty, to enter even a most minimal type of adulthood (maintaining a basic family). The growth of the category has increased the explosiveness and many researchers recount that such frustrated social youth formed the masses of rebel movements in West and Central Africa.

Fortress Europe protects us from an apparently unending African exodus. Yet Africans still manage to exit the continent in large numbers. It is important to point out that Africans leave their countries not so much for the bright promises of the West but rather due to difficulties they face at home. Secondly, migration beyond the continent is not separate to that of internal continental migrations but rather a continuation. Migration may be a direct response to natural disasters, war and internal conflicts (see section 3), but is also part of longstanding socio-economic patterns (see section 2). Despite the various faces and, moreover, scales of movement it is important to see how individuals use a variety of migration techniques and how for instance a young woman may take advantage of a forced refugee situation to alter her own life-realm. Or how economic motives for migration may come through for a young man running away from war in Sierra Leone and taken to Sweden as a refugee. Migrations are often not monocausal. It is furthermore central to point out that intra-Africa migration is part of the thriving informal economy and that remittances from outside Africa have become a more important economic factor within Africa than Western development aid.

By now it should be clear that Africa, Africans, and African change are just as difficult to discuss as corresponding items on Europe. Risk of overgeneralization is thus obvious, yet we may ask whether Africa as such should be viewed solely as a victim of circumstances and whether the current talk about “a new Africa” and “African agency” is simply a way of redeeming Africans.<sup>6</sup> Africans are both victims and agents on different levels. However it must be stressed that neo-liberal globalization as a force will not end African dependence on Western economic and political agendas. Yet at the same time it is also important to be aware that there is room for African states and African men and women to both navigate within the structure of the world system and to move their own agendas forward. But careful long-term strategies need to be developed.

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<sup>6</sup> Chabal, 2007 p. 8, 10.



# 1. Rural poverty, agrarian change and the struggle for resources

## *The significance of the rural*

Despite growing urbanisation on the African continent, the majority of Africans remain either physically located in, or dependent on, rural or agrarian environments. Most commonly, “rural”/“agrarian” has referred to non-urban, non-industrialised fields or land and its ownership/tenure and cultivation/use, and has implied environments characterized by various classes of farmers (and farm labour) or a “farming way of life”, as well as the promotion, protection of, or struggles over particular agricultural (class) interests. Such a focus has strongly influenced both more classic scholarship on agrarian change, as well as development policies on “rural development” and agriculture, and various land and agrarian reforms. In a related way, an emphasis on peasants and peasant production, and on “customary” tenure relations and traditional authorities, has dominated perspectives on “rural Africa”. This has tended to either mask, downplay or dichotomise more complex and varied dynamics, such as the mobilities and links between rural and urban areas and processes of social reproduction more generally. In this sense, notions of the rural or agrarian in contemporary Africa (as well as elsewhere) need to incorporate a much more diverse and changing set of interconnected conditions, relations and dynamics. It is necessary to guard against simplistic assumptions or narrow prescriptions that deepen economic impoverishment and social marginalisation or undermine environmental sustainability.

While not underestimating the scale and intensity of urban poverty, a large proportion of Africa’s poorest – themselves importantly differentiated by class, gender, age, ethnicity, religious or kinship ties, and so on – continue to live in rural areas under conditions of severe and sustained vulnerability. In acknowledging this, a great deal of attention in development discourse and practice has been geared towards rural “poverty reduction”, with various poverty reduction strategies and the Millennium Development Goals being the more recent examples of this global emphasis. Nonetheless, such policies and investments rest on many unexamined assumptions about rural or agrarian environments that may require more rigorous unpacking on the one hand, and attention to more extensive linkages with other seemingly “non-agrarian” or “non-rural” spaces, sectors and processes on different scales on the other.

## *Dynamics of exclusion and belonging*

African rural and agrarian environments, linked in different ways to urban as well as transnational sites, are constituted by complex processes of social differentiation, changing conditions of material access, and the ongoing transformation of social relations. These articulate with the broader processes already mentioned, generating multiple forms of exclusion as well as new modes of belonging.

Many older rural institutions are embedded in “customary” traditions and norms which emphasise redistribution and reciprocity. However, at times, these traditions and norms

also reinforce specific forms of exclusion along gender and generational lines, but increasingly also in terms of insiders and outsiders. Simultaneously, there are increasing and often contradictory challenges raised by more recent institutions, such as the formalisation agenda that is underway in several countries, which relate to growing pressures towards modernisation, commercialisation, and formalisation. Some of these initiatives are donor-led and driven by global development discourses, which can exacerbate tensions or create exclusions.

The emergence of new property systems and markets affect social and cultural meanings and dynamics in the long term. For instance, the drive to register and formalise property rights overlooks the broader significance of land in many African contexts beyond a simple means of production. Another crucial issue related to agrarian change, and shifting property and resource relations, concerns the existence of adequate democratic conditions that may combine the potential for rural material and economic surplus generation with meaningful social and cultural change. In this context, the question is which social forces or actors have authority and capacity to identify and promote change in a positive direction. In imagining “rural” and “agrarian” environments and attempting to understand how they get reshaped, it is important to consider how people organize to change the conditions of their lives. As such, one might do well to ask “how decisions are made and contested over who is able to access land-based resources” in such settings. “Whose claims are recognized, by whom, on what grounds, and where, is of vital importance in the study of African countrysides.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***The changing role of agriculture***

Agriculture (encompassing crops, livestock and fisheries) plays a key if complex role in the lives and livelihood generation of Africans across the continent, and continues to be critical to national development despite evidence of massive flight from the countrysides of the Third World and the failure of most rural development policies to stem this trend. As such, “it is pertinent to explore what the current role of agriculture and rural development in African national economies is and its potential for improving material standards of living and life chances. In other words, it is time to ask if agriculture spells welfare enhancement or decline for Africa’s rural dwellers”.<sup>8</sup>

There are at least three different types or scales of agriculture occurring and each requires or generates its own kinds of policies, politics and production and reproduction dynamics. There is large-scale commercial agriculture, which predominates in mainly former settler colonies; small-scale production for markets; and subsistence farming, undertaken mostly for home consumption. Despite the distinctions between scales, types and locations of farming, often associated with different kinds of administrative/tenurial arenas, they are all somehow linked to one another historically, economically, socially and politically. With regard to large-scale commercial farming where it exists (mainly in southern and parts of East Africa), this has largely emerged historically out of colonial dispossession of

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<sup>7</sup> Blair Rutherford. Commentary on Henry Bernstein’s paper at the Research Forum on *New agrarian questions in Africa*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 4 May 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Havnevik et al. draft paper-in-progress on *Agriculture toward poverty alleviation or impoverishment? Peasant smallholder farmers’ future in Africa*, Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

the best agro-ecological lands, and evolved through forms of coerced labour and long-term preferences and privileges for minority commercial farmers, while “under-developing” African farming on marginal lands. At the same time, it has been a key source of employment (albeit at extremely low wage levels) for many (often migrants) without either land or resources to cultivate. Nonetheless, in most parts of Africa, agriculture is still dominated by small-holder production regimes which are largely characterised by the significant role played by women and unequal gender relations, a mixed focus on subsistence production as well as small surpluses for exchange, generally low levels of productivity and high levels of poverty, and deepening environmental and natural resource degradation.

A majority of African countries are commodity-dependent, in that 50% or more of their exports are composed of non-oil commodities and most of these are agricultural commodities. Firstly this makes these countries highly vulnerable in relation to changing world markets in which agro-commodity prices, especially for “tropical” commodities, have been systematically declining in recent decades. Several reasons account for such low prices including structural over-supply especially of undifferentiated raw materials. Secondly, in the cases of meats, grains, sugar, oilseeds and cotton, producing countries in the developed world have stimulated over-supply as a result of their own domestic subsidy systems. Thirdly, in relation to products such as sugar and beef, health concerns in developed countries have led to declines in consumer demand. In other cases technological changes have allowed for increased substitution (as in tropical timber and cocoa) or reductions in raw material requirements (tea), or increased ability to use raw material of lower quality (coffee, tea, cocoa). Finally, there have been large productivity gains for crops such as corn, rice, sugar, soybeans and coffee following propagation of new higher-yielding crop varieties and greater farm mechanisation, but these have been associated with only a handful of countries such as Brazil and Vietnam, further marginalizing African growers. Under increasingly polarised global commodity conditions, the share of African countries in world commodity trade is declining, alongside their capacity to diversify into higher value commodities or manufacturing.

It is therefore not surprising that many farmers have “voted with their feet” by increasingly engaging in non-agricultural livelihoods or migrating to urban areas, or engaging in other forms of “de-peasantisation” or “de-agrarianisation”.<sup>9</sup> For some analysts, the solutions to rural poverty do not lie in over-emphasising the potential for rural entrepreneurship. Instead, it is suggested that policy makers should see “rural futures as differentiated and complex” and understand sustainable livelihoods as “increasingly likely to be divorced, spatially and occupationally, from the land”.<sup>10</sup> And yet there exists a paradox of decreasing returns from farming and increasing “de-agrarianisation” on the one hand, alongside intensified struggles over land on the other. This latter situation raises critical issues about the multiple material and symbolic

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<sup>9</sup> De-agrarianization is defined by Bryceson (2002) as “a long-term process of occupational adjustment, income-earning reorientation, social identification and spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly agricultural-based modes of livelihood.”

<sup>10</sup> Rigg, Jonathon, “Land, farming, livelihoods and poverty: rethinking links in the rural south”, *World Development*, vol. 34, No. 12 (2006), p. 196.

qualities of “land” beyond its agricultural or productive potential, which connects with interweaving questions of identity, belonging and citizenship for both rural and urban Africans under conditions of growing insecurity and uncertainty. All of the above has great relevance for how land and agrarian reforms need to be conceptualised.

### ***Diverse and changing landscapes***

Across the continent, the range of rural and agrarian settings, both in terms of physical environments and their patterns of property, production and power, are very diverse. In addition, a combination of internal processes of agrarian change, as well as global dynamics of integration and economic liberalisation, means that rural forms of production and reproduction are gradually developing in novel directions. These processes may accelerate if recent suggestions to grow export crops for bio-fuels are implemented. In addition, new “agrarian actors” are entering the scene, such as urban-based elites investing in rural land. All this makes it especially important to root an understanding of dynamic rural environments and agrarian change in historically grounded and spatially specific research.

Among the factors affecting agrarian landscapes is the ongoing process of state making, which includes various state projects that often accelerate small-scale and large-scale displacements of people that alter not only demographic patterns, but undermine the conditions of security and production in different rural environments. The limited exit options from the rural context contribute to an intensification of urban informalisation, which adds to the complexity of the existing urban-rural linkages.

A further factor is the continuation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The epidemic is undermining rural indigenous knowledge, as well as affecting the agricultural labour supply. The spread and deepening of HIV/AIDS has also increased the cost and time devoted to care within rural African households. The combined effects of this undermine rural production, and challenge social and cultural relations. Moreover, the deteriorating health situation and increased need for care add especially to the burden of rural women and children, who play central roles in African agrarian dynamics.

### ***Resource competition in changing environments***

Recent global trends in energy consumption have led to an emphasis on, and call for, increased bio-fuel production for ethanol/methanol production that is already adding to and deepening competition for land and over land use. This competition is likely to take place increasingly between various actors and involve both internal and external forces and interests. One example is the conflicts over the use of maize to develop methanol as a source of car fuel for the United States, which is pushing up the price of staple maize-based food in Mexico. Similar developments in Latin America provide valuable lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa, where there are now growing pressures to expand sugarcane production, or initiate jatropha plantations, to provide bio-fuels for European markets. However, the case of Latin-America shows that the local health and environmental impact of such sugar production has been neglected. In other developments on the continent, the pressure on African land and resources is currently also growing due to

increased investments in both agriculture and other sectors by China, in countries such as for instance Sudan and Angola, where China has invested heavily in the oil industry.

In some contexts, the HIV/AIDS epidemic precipitates not only critical household labour shortages through the death of the most productive members of society, but also intensifies resource conflicts that include property-grabbing and displacement of widows and orphans. These contestations over resources and property may intersect with other conflicts between men and women, between healthy and sick, as well as between generations.

In addition, such contestations and competition may utilise frictions and fissures between customary and statutory laws, and between informal and formalised logics. Resource conflicts also erupt between pastoralists and sedentary farmers, which in some cases are traceable back to divisive colonial policies. In other cases, such competition and conflicts have occurred over land and resources being devoted to nature reserves and national parks, which displace people and inflame relations with the surrounding populations. Such incidences are on the increase, as tourism becomes an increasingly profitable industry with greater revenue potential than agriculture for at least some actors. In these contexts, rural, national, and international interests and actors are bound to intersect.

### ***Summing up***

The majority of Africans remain either physically located in, or dependent on, rural or agrarian environments. Nevertheless the old rural/urban dichotomy is becoming increasingly irrelevant. A focus on links and mobility between rural and urban areas is needed. Also current processes of change create new dynamics of exclusion and belonging. Increased resource competition creates new contestations between men and women and between young and old, utilizing frictions and fissures between customary and statutory laws, and between informal and formalised logics. Understandings of resource and property regimes have so far led to several different kinds of responses to lessen or alleviate conflicts. These responses include community based initiatives, as well as local and state co-management of forests, game reserves, and national parks. However, options for resolving resource conflicts or lessening competition in sustainable ways require an appreciation of the co-existence of multiple authorities within rural settings. In light of this, it is necessary to acknowledge and maintain alternative spaces and opportunities for rural producers to voice their interests and needs from below.

## 2. Urban dynamics: Poverty, informalization and youth

### ***Organized interests and collective action in urban Africa***

There is no doubt that the destiny of Africa is mostly played out in urban centres, particularly the large cities. While urban centres have no monopoly on national phenomena, they do dominate national decision-making processes, debates and contentions that to a large extent have a bearing on the future of their respective countries. A trait that makes Africa's urban centres so strategically anchored is that they host not only the majority of national elites and institutions, but also a range of organized stakeholders whose activities see them playing a dominant role in (potentially) nationally significant issues. The predominantly urban location of the majority of elites, including the burgeoning middle-class, places urban centres—home to a significantly smaller but rapidly increasing proportion of national populations—as the major determinants of Africa's destiny.

Significant in this respect are voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions comprising, among others, self-help groups, business associations, advocacy groups, organized charities, non-governmental organizations, coalitions, community groups, professional associations, trade unions, and social movements. Whether representing professional or broader collective interests—such as law societies, trade unions, student unions, and teachers' associations—or advancing more radical agendas—such as those with a revolutionary or regime change agenda—these organizations and institutions are often inevitably ranged against the entrenched interests of the economic, political or social elites. In some respects the organized actors provide some kind of checks and balances by promoting, demanding, or encouraging transparent, accountable and responsive governance systems and processes. In other respects, especially within some of Africa's authoritarian governance systems, these organized non-state interests are catalysts and/or targets of state repression.

As the arena of voluntary collective action around shared interests, purposes and values, Africa's organized non-state actors<sup>11</sup> constitute a vital counterbalance to the state. The range and character of these actors is diverse, which is best captured, we feel, in the term “organized non-state actors”. For example, even under repressive authoritarian governance systems, civil society, however nascent or nebulous, continues to wield some clout that grants it the ability or potential to lay claim to or occupy vital political, social and economic spaces often monopolized by the state and its protégés. As such, voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions are the loci of contestation or conflict. However, as has been demonstrated in many countries, these can be co-opted, “bought”, or subjugated to serve the interests of the state, by for example granting it legitimacy and moral support.

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<sup>11</sup> We find that the term “organised non-state actors” more accurately reflects the range and diversity of this sector than the more nondescript term ‘civil society’.

Whatever their stance with respect to the state, Africa's mostly urban-based organized non-state interests have tactical and strategic repertoires, which, if sustained over a long period, become social movements. Some of these movements are driven by more professionalized and bureaucratized social movement organizations. Whatever the state of democracy and human rights, contentious politics continues to feature prominently in urban Africa. This is so because the state cannot constructively engage and acquiesce to all manner of collective claims. In most cases these are claims, which, if realised would negatively affect the entrenched advantages of the urban elites.

While it is difficult to map a definitive trajectory for Africa's mainly urban organized non-state interests, research suggests that collective action depends on three factors. These are: *political opportunities* (the structure of political opportunities or constraints confronting citizens); *mobilizing structures* (the forms of organization—informal as well as formal—available to the citizens); and *framing processes* (the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediates between opportunity and action). All three factors need to be present for meaningful collective action to be possible. Even in repressive political environments, a degree of political opportunity is needed for an aggrieved group to resort to collective action. Similarly, even with the best of organizational resources and the most strongly felt and widely shared grievances, the aggrieved group needs to claim some form of political space to make meaningful and sustained collective action possible. On this basis it can be postulated that whether Africa's mostly urban-based voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions serve as checks and balances to the state or degenerate into destructive and disruptive elements will depend on two key issues, namely, the economy and democracy. It is these two that will define political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes.

Strategies towards organized non-state actors cannot afford to neglect these three factors. While targeting individual organizations and institutions in the name of democracy, good governance, and human rights, for example, it may be more prudent and effective to zero in on factors that determine not only the existence and operations of these organizations and institutions, but also their emergence, effectiveness and ability to deliver. Sometimes there is more to be gained by dealing with what really makes organised non-state actors tick. Focusing on political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes is just such an approach. This strategy prises open the spaces needed for these actors to emerge and claim social, economic and political spaces, thereby calling the state to account.

### ***The informalization of “work”***

An important dimension of change in Africa pertains to a deep transformation in the spheres of employment and livelihood. As access to secure wage work opportunities declines in most countries in the region, people create alternative sources of income. This has resulted in a rapid increase in activities that are unregistered and unprotected by state law, the so-called “informal economy”. This trend is particularly evident in urban areas, where a significant share of the urban population depends on self-employment. Most of these are small-scale survivalist enterprises. The poor in Africa have long engaged in these kinds of activities. But in recent decades, new groups are also entering the informal

economy. These include redundant workers with professional skills and reasonable levels of education as well as individuals with some capital to start small enterprises that employ unregistered workers. In a context of economic deregulation, larger firms (including some of the “new” foreign investors) also increasingly are making use of casual employment and/or relying on a myriad of small-scale informal operators. A considerable part of the economic growth taking place seems to rely on these kinds of informal work. Indeed, African informal economies are today to a considerable extent integrated into international commodity circuits. This has opened opportunities for some groups but has also increased exposure to global market forces.

The above trends have resulted in considerable differentiation in the informal economy. Some groups are visibly thriving, i.e. those possessing the skills, the capital and the necessary contacts. The majority however are facing harsher conditions for earning a living in the informal economy. Increased competition among the poor, increased costs of operation (particularly for those dealing in imported commodities or using imported inputs), and the contraction of consumer purchasing power, have resulted in declining incomes for many. Women and children are usually overrepresented at the lowest income levels in the informal economy. To be sure, vulnerable groups try to adapt to the changed conditions by diversifying their livelihoods, increasing their mobility, relying on social networks etc, but a large body of research indicates that present policies of economic liberalisation are eroding, rather than supporting, the livelihoods of large numbers of people in Africa. These harsh economic realities should be a core concern in a development strategy for Africa.

Vulnerable groups in the informal economy also often have to deal with hostile attitudes on the part of their governments, despite official discourses of tolerance and support towards the informal economy. Although most countries have held multi-party elections, large groups continue to be excluded from formal politics and many governments continue to insulate themselves from the needs and demands of the poor. Particularly in cities, local governments often adopt restrictive and violent measures towards small-scale entrepreneurs, although the fees they pay are often the main source of income for local governments. At the same time, in a context of multi-party politics, governments also regard the large number of people in the informal economy as “vote banks”. The poor are often vulnerable to political manipulation. But there are also many instances where groups in the informal economy are pressing their governments for change, on their own or in collaboration with other interest groups among organized non-state actors.

Indeed, people working in the informal economy increasingly organize collectively in order to defend their livelihoods. People have always organized themselves into groups for purposes of welfare, business or for mitigating of material uncertainty. But a new generation of associations is emerging that engages with the state and is assertive of people’s rights to earn a living. However, these associations vary greatly in the extent to which their internal structures are democratic and representative of the poorest in the informal economy, including women.

The international policy approaches have taken two dominant directions – the regulation approach and the micro-finance approach. Micro-credit may provide much needed capital for small entrepreneurs. Regulations of various kinds are needed to provide a minimum of protection to vulnerable groups in the informal economy. However, both approaches tend to disregard the larger set of constraints mentioned above that weigh on informal economies and keep large numbers of people in poverty. Given the integration of informal economies in the wider international economy, pro-poor kinds of regulation should not be an issue to be pursued only at the local/domestic level, but also at the level of global institutions of governance. A major gap and challenge is for international development strategies to connect to grassroots organizations that articulate the defence of socioeconomic rights of people working in the informal economy.

### ***Children and youth's mobility***

Cities are not only for the urban population. Every year people from rural areas journey to rural towns and cities to visit relatives, trade produce from their region for goods to use or resell, to find work and to get education; of these many are children and youth. Whilst absolute numbers of child and youth migrants may have increased in recent years with population growth and fluctuated with changing urbanization rates, their mobility is a long-standing practice involving fostering arrangements between kin for young children and labour migration for older children. Colonial records reveal that male youth were recruited for work by the colonial administration from the age of 14 years. Since the 1990s, children and youth have emerged as visible social categories in policy arenas: a trend that has brought to light new sets of concerns needing to be addressed.

The new visibility bifurcates to focusing on child protection and on youth as potential trouble-makers. Child protection work, aimed at the age group 0-18 years, is underpinned by human rights principles rooted in an increasingly internationalized notion of childhood according to which children should remain at home and in school until their late teens. Youth, from the age of 15 years up to 24, 30 and even 35 years, have been in the spotlight for their participation in armed conflict, though focus has been much more on male youth than on female youth, unless the young women were seen as victims. Little attention has been given to the many youth in both urban and rural areas, who struggle to make a livelihood and attain some of their dreams for the future.

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#### **Distinguishing between overlapping social categories**

The emphasis on two distinct categories has also led to an unhelpful ghettoisation within research and professional communities (Caputo 1995). Even though 15-17-year olds, in particular, fall into both categories, studies of youth focus on different aspects of life from studies of children. In Latin America [as well as in Africa], for instance, youth have mainly been studied by social scientists in relation to sexual behaviour, pregnancy, drugs and violence (Welti 2002). Indeed these conceptual distinctions are used by young people and their supporters: teenagers sometimes claim the label 'child' to win sympathy, whereas those who wish to denigrate them may call them 'youth' (Boyden 2000). Bringing children and youth together allows us to question some of the conventional ways of thinking about either category, as well as serving to disrupt the adult-child conceptual binary (Aitken 2001). (Ansell 2005:4-5)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Nicola Ansell (2005) *Children, Youth and Development*. London: Routledge.

Concerning children's and youth's work, the focus has primarily been on boys working in artisan mining, small-scale fisheries or cocoa plantations, on girls working as domestics, and on street-children as one uniform group. Notwithstanding the importance of protecting vulnerable children from exploitation and maltreatment and securing their educational opportunities, recent research has drawn attention to the need for assessing whether this notion of childhood is appropriate in all contexts and for all children. Not only do children's needs and preferences depend on their age and maturity but also on the economic and social conditions under which they live.

Protective measures aimed at getting street-children off the streets were based on the assumption that they were all delinquent or at risk of becoming delinquent, despite the fact that many were hawking food, trading petty commodities or offering services like shoe-shining and goods transport. Measures to reduce exploitation of migrant children, for example, branded intermediaries as traffickers and "rescued" children by repatriating them. In many cases, these measures have undermined children's security at the migration destination where intermediaries, often kin, help them find work and solve problems. With accusations of being traffickers, kin are becoming more reluctant to secure young relatives jobs and in particular to interfere in conflicts over payment or working conditions.

In addition to propounding an image of poor children as victims, the new visibility has however also given rise to a beginning acknowledgement of children and youth as social and economic agents. Children, usually from wealthier families, participate in democratization processes through *Children's Parliaments*. Even if their say is limited due to age discrimination, their incorporation in civil society processes and social networks encircling political arenas may have a positive long-term effect. However, the risk is high that existing inequalities are exacerbated by marginalizing the poor, and in particular the rural poor, even further than today.

Through writing its own Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Union has also invoked children's and youth's social and economic roles both as workers and within the family context. Article 31 reads, for instance, "The child, subject to his age and ability [...] shall have the duty; to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need." Furthermore, the Charter obliges African states to promote working children's rights through establishing a minimum age for employment and regulating their working conditions. In recent years, the youth movement in South Africa has been very active in pushing for the Africa Youth Charter, which was drafted by the African Union July 2006. However, the Youth Charter does not resolve, or even problematise, its overlap with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in targeting the 15-17-year-olds, nor does it discuss gender differences in belonging to the category of youth. As of October 2006, only Mali had signed the Youth Charter, hence its effect on legislative and administrative procedures remains to be seen.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Charters can be downloaded for the AU web-page: <http://www.african-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/treaties.htm>

Children's and youth's migration is indeed part of their social and economic agency. Some migrate to live with kin who are willing to provide them with their school education or an apprenticeship but may move to other kin if better opportunities arise. The conditions and length of such stays are negotiable, but usually in indirect ways rather than in face-to-face conversations. Others migrate to earn money to continue their education at their own cost or to provide younger siblings with education. Many migrate to find work after they have finished or dropped out of school. Whilst children and youth of very poor families leave, or are sent away, to help parents in securing the basic needs, this is a much more common practice in Asia. In much of rural Africa, families still rely on smallholder farming, so when children travel to towns and urban areas it is primarily to earn money for their own upkeep. Girls' and boys' ability to migrate on their own for educational or income-earning purposes varies tremendously, even within one region, hence gender differences need to be empirically assessed.

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#### **Childrens and youth's migration from the Upper East Region, Ghana**

30-year old Peter, the *de facto* head of a rural household is the only member of his family to have completed senior secondary school. After his father died when he was a young teenager, Peter used to travel to his brother in the Western Region of Ghana during the school holidays to help him with his farming, usually returning with sufficient funds to cover his school costs and some of the costs of 'by-day' labour (paid daily contracted labour) to farm the farms his father had left and to care for his mother. His brothers continue to send money home occasionally.

Peter's 22-year old wife, Christina, is a tailoring apprentice and also undertakes some petty trading in the local market. In the past, she has also been an independent child migrant. She was collected by her aunt when she was about eleven years old to help her with domestic work. After one year, an Ashanti woman asked her aunt if she could take Christina as a housemaid and Christina lived and worked for her for about three years. She was rewarded with clothing, a sewing machine and some ₵300,000 (as Peter put it, 'Big money in those days'). However, her aunt appropriated these things and Christina eventually returned to the north with very little to show for her time in the south. (Hashim 2006:7-9)<sup>14</sup>

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Children's and youth's mobility is not an anomaly. Especially in Southern Africa and West Africa, the migration system has developed over a long time forced by colonial and apartheid politics and by dire economic circumstances. One important aspect of pervasive migration over several generations is that nobody finds it strange or wrong that young people wish to migrate. Children and youth make decisions about migrating. Since travelling to urban areas, neighbouring countries and further afield is the only way to learn skills other than agriculture, artisan production of tools and utensils, and small-scale trade, seniors often accept young people's wish to leave home, though social practices may give rise to gender differences because boys are needed in farming or herding or because girls marry early. However, seniors and juniors may disagree on the timing: seniors because they wish to protect their children from hardship or need them around, juniors because they feel old enough to move on in life. Young people thus use migration to negotiate particular social positions but only achieve recognition if complying with their seniors' ideas of what it takes to be considered youth, adult, or successful. At the migration destination, on the other hand, these youngsters' opportunities are circumscribed by their rural origins, poverty and lack of education. In addition to this

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<sup>14</sup> Iman Hashim (2006) *The Positives and Negatives of Children's Independent Migration: Assessing the Evidence and the Debates*. Working Paper T16, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty University of Sussex, Brighton.

marginalization, the need to earn money every day to eat, matures them and gives them a better understanding of their rural seniors' endeavours to secure food for the family, which in turn incorporates them in the kinship relations stretching from rural to urban areas, to the diaspora in other countries. Children and youth also demonstrate social and economic agency in the ways they enter the labour market, in spite of the challenging conditions. With few formal employment opportunities, young people rely on the informal sector to earn an income. While urban youth of a certain social and economic status can afford to test out different avenues to find work because they live at home, most migrants cannot. They arrive with little money in their pocket and almost no knowledge of the city, and as food hawking or trade require start-up capital beyond their means, they cannot enter into these occupations but rely on offering petty services such as shoe-shining and head-loading. Alternatively, they depend on older migrants to obtain information about, and possibly be introduced to, potential employers.

Economic crisis, retrenchment of public servants and decline in real wages have brought about an upsurge of income diversification at all levels of the urban economy where rich and poor engage in multiple activities formally and informally. As a result, the informal sector has long ceased to consist primarily of one-person businesses and forms a stratified labour market with little regulation to secure the rights of employees. This is where many children and youth find employment. They may appear in the statistics as unemployed, or be construed as underemployed, but the fact is that they often work long hours for low wages. Driven by the wish for better working conditions, security and higher wages, they constantly look for other jobs, seek to become independent traders or move on to another migration destination where they hope conditions are better.

### ***Summing up***

Africa's urban centres host not only the majority of national elites and institutions, but also a sizable informal sector, made up of underemployed and unemployed men and women, some of them young migrants from rural areas or from neighbouring countries. Children and young people in Africa have come into focus among policy makers and researchers, partly with a concern about child protection (children as victims of war and trafficking) and partly with a concern about youth as potential trouble-makers. The new visibility has also, however, given rise to a beginning acknowledgement of children and youth as social and economic agents. They demonstrate this agency in the ways they struggle for an outcome in spite of the challenging conditions. Men and women, including youth, who work in the informal economy, increasingly organize collectively in order to defend their livelihoods. A new generation of associations is emerging that engages with the state and is assertive of people's rights to earn a living.

### 3. Conflicts, displacement and transformation

#### ***Understanding conflicts***

Understanding conflicts – their roots, practices and persistence – requires attention to a wide range of historical, social, spatial, economic and political processes and dynamics, both local and trans-local, and cannot be captured by a single explanation or theory. Beyond a complete dependence on economic and cultural explanations, it is important that the complex causes of violent conflict be understood so that policies aimed at ending such conflict and promoting peace can be appropriate and sustainable. In this regard, international actors need to be wary about promoting one-size-fits-all solutions as quick exit strategies from post-conflict societies.

The focus here is primarily on collective forms of violent conflict in contemporary Africa, while importantly acknowledging that these are often born out of combinations of long-term structural and symbolic violence that are less immediately visible. Such conflicts are associated with instability, war, displacement and destruction, precipitating both sudden and sustained human suffering, but also generating creative forms of survival, resistance and recovery.

#### ***Civil wars and regional conflicts***

Armed conflicts as well as severe economic and political crises, even if mainly occurring within national boundaries, continue to have far-reaching, long-term and varied effects for different groups in Africa, not only in immediately neighbouring states but in whole regions. The escalation of conflicts beyond national borders can be attributed to several factors. These include the involvement of neighbouring states in supporting one faction or the other in the conflict, the proliferation of small arms and the mobility of fighters in crossing borders, the artificiality of the borders of African states, the activities of trans-global business interests that extract resources and trade in arms in conflict zones, and refugee movements across borders. In addition to becoming direct actors in these regionalised civil wars, neighbouring states are also involved as hosts to large numbers of forcibly displaced migrants fleeing a complex humanitarian emergency.

Examples of regionalised conflicts include the “networked wars”<sup>15</sup> of the Mano River area of West Africa, where the Liberian civil war that started in 1989 drew in neighbouring states through “informal transboundary networks”, contributing to the outbreak of civil war in Sierra Leone in 1991 when rebels, supported by a Liberian rebel leader, invaded the country. Just as the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone were nearing an end at the close of the 1990s, a coup – later followed by civil war – took place in Côte d’Ivoire in 2002, amid reports that some ex-combatants from Liberia and Sierra Leone had been involved in the fighting. The result of this is that the countries in the region – Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Burkina Faso – have been adversely affected by the conflicts and have had to contend with serious security

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<sup>15</sup> Duffield, Mark, ‘War as a Network Enterprise: The New Security Terrain and Its Implications’, *Cultural Values*, Vol. 6, no. 1&2, 2002.

challenges. In the same way, the conflict in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta involving insurgent groups has had serious implications not only for the region but also for global energy security.

Similarly, the Great Lakes Region of East and Central Africa was thrown into turmoil following the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the outbreak of civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1997, when Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) forces backed by neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda invaded the country and seized power. The subsequent break-up of the alliance led to the expulsion of the erstwhile foreign allies, who then backed new rebel forces and commenced what was later described as "Africa's first world war",<sup>16</sup> involving over seven rebel armies and the national armies from four other neighbouring states. In the same way, the conflict in Sudan's Darfur has had ramifications for neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) and for regional security in Central Africa more generally. In addition, the crisis in Somalia has drawn Ethiopia, Uganda and Eritrea into the conflict in the Horn of Africa. In a somewhat different way, the ever-deepening political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe has had increasingly significant economic, demographic and political implications for neighbouring states in southern Africa, especially South Africa.

The regionalisation of civil wars in West, Central and East Africa has posed formidable challenges to regional security as well as global security. Given the trend towards the securitization of development, there is a need to re-think and re-focus international engagement with Africa in relation to conflict management and peace building. Central to this is the role of regional organizations, particularly the African Union, civil society organisations and African citizens themselves. There is a need for studies that will shed more light on the socio-economic roots of conflict as well as the contradictions embedded in the governance systems which tend to exclude the majority of the people from participating in decision-making and systematically structure them out of the distribution of the benefits of national citizenship and wealth. It is also necessary to capture the role of various international actors in such civil and regionalised conflicts and recommend actions that would discourage actors that directly or indirectly fuel conflict. Such studies should also set forth policies that deepen the inclusive policies which deepen democracies, and enhance the capacities of African institutions to deal with conflict prevention, management and resolution, as well as peace building in a sustained and equitable manner.

### ***Forced displacement***

Africa has been defined by many as a continent of people "perpetually on the move", where migration of different kinds, voluntary and involuntary, has constituted a common and routine practice for vast numbers of Africans over centuries (see also section 2). Yet it is important to retain a distinction between migration *per se* (and especially voluntary migration), and the causes, dynamics, experiences and effects of *forced* displacement. There are many significant intersections between processes and people constituting

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<sup>16</sup> Nabudere, D. 'Africa's First World War: Mineral Wealth, Conflicts and War in the Great Lakes Region', Pretoria: *AAPS Occasional Paper Series*, Vol. 8, no. 1, 2004.

“migrants” and “displaces”. Forced displacement continues to be generated by a range of conditions, including wars and other kinds of violent political conflicts, but also by ideological programmes such as mass villagisation, land reforms or “revolutions”, various development-related projects such as the construction of large dams, creation of national parks, mining operations and urban renewal schemes, as well as severe economic or environmental crises. Forced displacements resulting particularly from civil wars and other major conflicts and crises on the continent are altering the demographic, social, economic, political, cultural and environmental landscapes of many regions. In the process, not only are resources – including bodies, goods, monies and politics – moving across borders (legally and illegally) but border zones themselves are also becoming key sites of both tension and transformation

By 1994, close to twenty-five million Africans – an estimated *one in twenty-four* – were displaced persons. Of the world’s present (recorded) 25 million “conflict-induced” internally displaced, over half are in Africa.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there are many millions across the continent that remain *unrecorded* or officially unacknowledged, not least an estimated two million illegal Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa.

Much of the attention on forced displacement and displacees has been channelled through dominant humanitarian and technocratic discourses and policies that define and target the somewhat abstract (even if at times necessary) categories of “refugees”, “internally displaced persons” (IDPs), “development-induced displaces” (DIDs), as well as those forcibly resettled in particular places. Such discourses have tended to emphasise and simplify and to reinforce victimhood, rather than seeing and engaging with displacees themselves as heterogeneous and part of much more complex, uneven and multi-scalar historical and contemporary processes and projects. International policies and interventions need to aim beyond the more immediate suffering and survival needs of displacees and integrate these with a longer-term perspective on change and sustainable development. They need to be grounded in more complex analyses of who constitutes different kinds of displacees, what specific conditions have produced their displacement and how displacement in turn generates new dynamics of (internal and external, formal and informal) exclusion and creativity, and what displacees’ own resources, strengths and visions are for recovery and transformation.

### ***Diverse vulnerabilities and modes of survival***

Not only the causes but the experiences of violent conflict, crisis and displacement are extremely diverse. During such periods, confusion and vulnerability prevail, with familiar spaces, structures, systems and relationships being undermined or even completely destroyed. As such, not only are the basic material conditions of life – that is, “the means to go on” – severely undermined, so too are the physical and institutional structures and

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<sup>17</sup> See also Vincent, Marc, 1998. ‘Introduction and Background’, in Marc Vincent and Birgitte Refslund Sørensen (eds), *Caught between Borders. Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced*, (London/Sterling Virginia: Pluto Press, with the Norwegian Refugee Council), 2001. This set of figures excludes refugees – for example from earlier civil wars as in Angola and Mozambique – and those displaced by natural disasters and development projects, as well as those who are displaced but remain undocumented.

ordinary procedures of civic life that provide the necessary (if illusory) predictabilities of existence. Yet not all landscapes of war and conflict look the same. Some are indeed scattered with dead bodies and “destroyed houses, burned-out cars and innumerable checkpoints guarded by young boys”,<sup>18</sup> or marked by seemingly endless trails of refugees on foot, or by desolate, abandoned fields. But other places might be the sites of bustling markets or simply retain an unexpected peacefulness and “normalcy” of everyday life, at least for periods, even though such spaces are marked by a perpetual threat of violence and disruption.

At the same time, not everything “official” always collapses in times of conflict and crisis. While health care, schools, electricity or sanitation services might decline or even vanish for extended periods, state security agencies and surveillance may well increase in efficiency, even while a multiplicity of old and new authorities may emerge in diverse spaces, altering both national and everyday modes of rule. War lords, traditional leaders and informal militia including child soldiers, as well as more “benign” institutions such as churches, aid agencies and non-governmental organisations, are among the other (often competing) forms of authority that are key actors under conditions of war, violent conflict and severe crisis, but also critical in post-conflict situations.

Paradoxically, these conditions of violence and uncertainty also open up new if highly uneven spaces of possibility for differently positioned actors. New “systems” of (elite) control, distribution and accumulation are created and solidified for a time, where the boundaries and relationships between the official and the unofficial, the legal and illegal, are redefined. For ordinary citizens caught up in wars, conflicts and crises, innovative if often risky practices of survival and even resistance surface and new forms and spaces of enterprise and exchange emerge, challenging simplistic interpretations of large-scale conflict and apocalyptic notions of “failed states”.

One of the strategies for large numbers of the internally displaced or those living under conditions of extreme uncertainty, has been to “voluntarily” migrate to other countries, including beyond the continent to Europe, including Sweden. For those fleeing across borders, often done under dangerous conditions, a range of interweaving factors affect how things might turn out “on the other side”, such as: the level of official status or “illegality” in the host country; language or other cultural barriers or commonalities; differences of and intersections between class, gender, age, race or ethnicity; prior levels of education and skill; previous migration histories or networks. This raises difficult yet critical challenges to neighbouring or other “receiving” states on a number of inter-related levels. Not only are there implications for policies, legislation and capacities in host countries to deal with the formal categories of refugees and asylum-seekers, there are also challenges in relation to overall immigration and integration policies (especially in Europe), as well as with respect to foreign policy. In the case of South Africa, for example, the refusal of the South African government to formally recognise

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<sup>18</sup> Utas, Mats. *Sweet Battlefields. Youth and the Liberian Civil War*, (Uppsala: Uppsala University Dissertations in Cultural Anthropology, 2003), p. 7.

Zimbabweans crossing the border as legitimate “refugees” has resulted in the lack of protection for and sustained vulnerability of mostly “illegal” migrants, estimated to be in their millions.

### ***Processes of transformation: Peacebuilding, recovery and reinvention***

The commonsense notion of transformation generally implies a marked change, usually for the better or at least with an intended improvement. However, it is used here *not* as a normative prescription for particular change, but rather as a conceptual lens through which to reflect on how different states, non-state agencies and citizens both deal with uncertainty and engage with changing the conditions of vulnerability and uncertainty that arise in contexts of war, violence and severe crisis.

With regard to the more formal institutional domains in which processes of post-conflict transformation are imagined and discussed, there has been a gradual shift from the idea of “conflict resolution” and “conflict management” to the notion of “conflict transformation”. “Conflict resolution” implies that conflict is entirely negative, and hence something that should be – and can be – permanently resolved through various forms of management-style intervention or mediation. “Conflict management” assumes that conflicts are longer-term processes that take longer to resolve, but nonetheless envisages that violence and volatility can be resolved and that people can be “managed” or controlled through correct practices. However, this does not address the underlying causes of the problem<sup>19</sup>.

Some of these causes, and the need to address them, were consciously taken up by successive Secretaries-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan. In a Report to the UN Security Council framed as “An Agenda for Peace”, Boutros-Ghali,<sup>20</sup> for example, noted that achieving sustainable peace would “require our utmost effort to enhance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to promote sustainable economic and social development for wider prosperity, to alleviate distress and curtail the existence and use of massively destructive weapons”. Kofi Annan<sup>21</sup> viewed peace building as being related to “actions undertaken at the end of a conflict to consolidate peace and prevent a recurrence of armed confrontation”. Within such frameworks, successful peace building requires the recognition of conflict as a dynamic aspect of social life that can be transformed or modified, and that can promote mutual understanding by changing the perceptions of issues, actions and other groups and working collectively (and non-violently) towards increased justice and equality in society.

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<sup>19</sup> Lederach, John, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press), 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Boutros-Ghali, Boutros, *An Agenda for Peace*, (Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council, S/24111, June 17), 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Annan, Kofi, *The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa*, (Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council, S/1998/318, April 13), 1989.

Other perspectives have tended to emphasise an even more “multilayered approach”. As Bush proposes,<sup>22</sup> “peacebuilding refers to those initiatives which foster and support sustainable structures and processes, which strengthen the prospects for peaceful co-existence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, reoccurrence, or continuation of violent conflict. The process entails both short-term and long-term developmental, political, economic and social objectives”. This views peace building in holistic terms that capture the conflict-peace-development connections, and encompass processes that cover the entire society. It could either be preventive or transformative, or both in contexts where conflict has been endemic or prolonged. Also, peace building raises issues of the place of indigenous knowledge and practices, and national ownership of the processes and structures involved. It is in this regard, that international peace building is, in itself, a contested terrain.

Just as wars and conflicts involve a complex range of actors with often shifting interests, peace building equally involves many different interests and actors that cut across local, national and global scales. International peace building in particular is hinged on a series of interventionist policies and actions by multilateral organizations, donor-countries, and regional organizations in war-afflicted or post-conflict societies, often justified on the grounds of humanitarian/human rights and security concerns for national sovereignty.

Given the geo-politics of the post-Cold War, post-9-11 world, peace building in Africa has become inextricably intertwined with the securitization of development and the deeper integration of international aid into international peace agendas underpinned by ideological and strategic interests. Not surprisingly, within this broad interventionist paradigm – linked in no small way to the hegemony of neoliberalism – international peace building has often been used to promote “a particular vision of how (post-conflict) states should be organised internally – based on the principles of liberal democracy and market oriented economics”.<sup>23</sup> Thus a great deal of international support for post-conflict reconstruction in war-torn societies is either implicitly or explicitly ideologically framed to promote a particular type of peace and development. In addition, despite substantial variations in the conditions and contexts of post-conflict countries, there is a tendency to adopt the same peace building policies across the board, which fail to address the roots of conflict and rather contribute to the re-creation of the very conditions that led to conflict in the first instance. A typical example relates to the use of post-war elections as a quick exit strategy for the international community after warring factions sign peace agreements, without addressing the underlying roots of the conflict or acts of impunity committed during the war. In both cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia where elections were held following the end of civil wars in 1996 and 1997, the fledging democracies floundered, followed by a regression to civil war.

Yet as much as conflicts and crises have complex roots and defy simple definition, “peace” should not be assumed to be simply the absence of conflict. Nor should one

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<sup>22</sup> Bush, Kenneth. ‘Beyond Bungee Cord Humanitarianism: Towards a Democratic Agenda for Peacebuilding’, *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 17, 1996, p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> Paris, Roland, 2002, “International peacebuilding and the ‘mission civilisatrice’”, *Review of International Studies*, 28, pp. 637-656

assume that all involved parties are automatically interested in or expect a peaceful resolution to a particular conflict or crisis. In fact, peace and stability often go counter to the interests and projects of various actors, both local and international, who may benefit materially or politically from sustained chaos and uncertainty. In addition, while war, conflict and crisis inevitably cause “disorder and ruin” for vast numbers of ordinary citizens and should never be underestimated, for others, especially for many youth, such conditions are increasingly the norm, the “natural order of things”.<sup>24</sup>

The role of the international community in peace building and post-conflict transformation needs to come under closer scrutiny. While being multilayered, it is possible to see complementarities and contradictions between the bilateral and multilateral levels. Such contradictions are often reflected in the double standards of the world’s powers in the pursuit of their strategic and economic interests in Africa. Furthermore, given the complex nature of global relations, some trans-global actors operate outside of the formal structures and cannot be easily regulated or sanctioned for their role in Africa’s wars. For example, China’s engagement with African countries downplays human rights as a conditionality for aid and cooperation, and tends to provide considerable leverage for some African countries with poor human rights records. The policy challenge therefore includes the need for more coherence, justice and uniformity in ways that the international community engages with Africa.

### ***Implications of globalization***

A globalising world puts Africa under pressure in two fronts: the widening gap between developed countries and a resource-rich, but impoverished Africa and the widening gap between the rich and the poor within African countries, which fuel social crises, mass misery, crises of citizenship, migration and in some cases, conflict. This places a major challenge before the AU and an international community that is both concerned about peace and development in Africa, as well as the security implications of the mass migration of African youth to Europe in “search of the good life”.

Another challenge relates to the question of the nature of the international community with which the AU would necessarily engage. To take one example – the European Union, some of whose members have had long-established historical relations with Africa, and which is tied to Africa through a series of multilateral and bilateral agreements and relations. While Euro-African relations at the formal level appear clear and concise, it is also possible to glean the strong undercurrents of several “Europes” dealing with Africa, in which some individual EU member-states with special strategic, economic and national interests either manipulate the European platform to pursue such goals, or pursue such goals “outside of”, but not in direct confrontation with the EU platform. These create some complications, or in worst cases, promote the feeling of double standards by the international community in its relations with Africa. Such feelings hamper relations, and fuel some resistance to attempts at “dictating to Africa”, on

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<sup>24</sup> Finnström, Sverker, ‘Meaningful Rebels? Young adult perceptions on the Lord’s Resistance Movement/Army in Uganda’. In Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas and Henrik E. Vigh (eds), *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood. Social Becoming in an African Context*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2006.

how best to run its own affairs. Given the nature of globalisation and the ways its impinges on, or undermines national sovereignty, the issue of how to address the potential areas of tension between hegemonic forces within the international community and the African Union, poses yet another challenge.

The African Union has through the NEPAD attempted to address some of the concerns for Africa's place in a globalising world. Issues of better terms of trade, economic growth, development, peace and the redistribution of wealth both between Africa and the world, and within Africa itself remain on the front burner. Closely tied to this is the question of democratization of the international system, including the UN Security Council, and African countries themselves. The political economy issues perhaps pose the most potent challenge to the AU, and there can be no easy solutions, even if the solutions must be hinged upon African initiative and ownership, they will need to engage with, and reflect the realities in the wider world. Another emerging issue relates to the new scramble for Africa's resources, and how this can be creatively channelled by African leaders and states for the benefit of its peoples, while ensuring that the 'scramble' does not provoke new contradictions on the continent as a result of conflicts linked to the competition by external forces for Africa's resources.

At another level, a hitherto unexplored area of security in Africa that could become a major challenge to the AU is the whole issue of the nexus between pandemics and regional security, and the emerging concerns over environmental security issues in the continent. Pandemics do not only threaten food security and undermine productivity; they also threaten the capacity of regional peacekeepers and national armies, as well as populations. Also issues of climate change, that lead to flooding, desertification, and migration, that could contribute to intensified suffering and new environmental conflicts would need to be addressed.

### ***Ways ahead***

The foregoing suggests the need to re-think post-conflict transformations in ways that critically address the complex causes, manifestations and persistence of conflicts and crises – including the role of states in stimulating and sustaining such conflicts – but which also recognise that citizens themselves are engaged in multiple processes of survival, adaptation and reinvention that reshape both their own lives and the broader social, political and economic landscapes of which they are a part. More critically then, what is needed is an acknowledgement of and space and support for the participation of a range of local actors and locally generated and owned initiatives that position those affected by conflicts and crises at the core of transformatory projects of peace building, recovery and reconstruction.

## 4. Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS

### *Changing ideas of women and gender in development work*

During the last twenty years issues of women and gender have been high on the agenda of African governments development agencies. The series of UN World Conferences in the early 1990s, culminating in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, had important influence in Africa, through participation from African women's organizations, and through impact on government structures. During this period the initial framework of Women in Development was replaced by the more embracing Gender and Development approach, designed to focus on power relations between women and men. Also adapted during this span of years was the idea of 'mainstreaming gender'. The mainstreaming strategy was devised in order to avoid specific projects targeting women as an ad-on to otherwise gender-blind development initiatives.

In practice, however, things have happened differently. African governments, ministries and societies are not gender neutral. Nor are donor development organizations. Other more implicit agendas have been active in addition to the official gender mainstreaming plans. States in Africa as elsewhere are structures established on male terrain. As a result gender mainstreaming efforts have rarely been given the power and finance they would have needed in order really to make an impact.

In the meanwhile donor attention in Africa, to a certain extent, has returned to 'women'. Development initiatives targeting women have again become popular, maybe for slightly different reasons than before the turn to 'gender' in the 1990s. The "women needs development" of the 1980s has turned into "development needs women". The 'women as victims' approach has been replaced by "a new perception of women as powerful, independent agents"<sup>25</sup> - also in economic terms. "When we focus on women, we get the best return on our money," the Danish Minister for Development says. "Women invest in their families, in family welfare and thus in society. For this reason Denmark places an increasing part of development aid in specific women-related projects."<sup>26</sup>

However, even if the assumptions and rationale for focusing on women and/or gender in contexts of development in the 1980s and now may look different – from the initial: "poor oppressed women in need of help" to the present "dynamic social agents" - these two lines of justification often in practice co-exist. Both are based on a shared set of assumptions regarding Africa as 'underdeveloped' and 'behind', and of 'African culture' as patriarchal and woman-oppressive: cultures where women are perpetual minors, with no rights of their own to land or property, and with little personal freedom.

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<sup>25</sup> Sida 2005: 5

<sup>26</sup> Interviews with Ulla Tørnæs, Information 03.03.2007 and Politiken 08.03.2007

### ***‘African culture’ – a battlefield of gender power***

Such assumptions are increasingly being questioned by African and non-African gender scholars. They acknowledge that present gender relations of power in most African contexts are patriarchal and male dominated – but they suggest a different historical trajectory, compared to the mainstream notion of African women oppressed by traditional culture and Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP). Rather than seeing the roots of contemporary African patriarchal structures in ‘African culture’ as such, these scholars point to “the new and growing patriarchal systems imposed on our societies through colonialism and Western religious and educational influences.”<sup>27</sup> In their eyes much of what is claimed by African leaders to be ‘traditional African culture’ is in fact invented tradition, with input and inspiration from Christianity and colonial mores, in parts of Africa also from Islam.

Accordingly ‘African culture’ is highly contested terrain, claimed not only by development organizations, but also by certain African elites. The notion of ‘African Renaissance’, a high profile enterprise, signalling a ‘new African self-consciousness’ *vis a vis* the Western world, rest on interpretations of ‘African culture’ which are no less patriarchal than the colonial anthropological understandings, which underpin much development aid – the latter like the former often sprinkled with Christian morality, a morality currently being boosted by the spectacular influx of Pentecostal evangelism.

African gender scholars tap into ‘culture’ for very different reasons, presenting strikingly different interpretations of social structures in pre-colonial Africa. Re-analyzing old ethnographic texts and criticising the (generally white, male, Christian) authors’ patriarchalizing interpretations of African societies, these scholars come up with a series of alternative conceptualizations, which challenge not only colonial anthropology but also Western feminist lines of thinking. In much of pre-colonial Africa, they say, hierarchies were rarely based gender *per se* (men over women), but rather on seniority, and on positions inside/outside a certain lineage. Motherhood was highly valued, and the link between siblings (born of the same womb) was often stronger than the link between husband and wife. For women this implied that their status as mothers, sisters and daughters was more important than their status as wives. Also motherhood was not necessarily linked to wifehood. According to these scholars the idea of a child being ‘illegitimate’ if the mother is not a wife, did not exist in Africa prior to the influence from Christianity and Islam.

Also African feminist studies of male and female sexualities go against the grain of patriarchal interpretations of ‘African culture’. With a few exceptions, studies of sexuality have taken off very recently, decisively pushed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which - as put by Sylvia Tamale – “has flung open the doors on sexuality, and forced into the open myths and secrets in relationships and identities that are often silenced or taken for granted.”<sup>28</sup> African feminists show that marriage and sexuality are not necessarily interlinked in the ways African patriarchs (and the Bible) preach, and that same-sex

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<sup>27</sup> Ifi Amadiume 1987: 9

<sup>28</sup> Sylvia Tamale 2003

practices far from being a Western import, as alleged by homophobic African leaders, have existed under specific circumstances in pre-colonial societies all over the continent. As pointed out by Jessica Horn “homophobia is less an ‘African’ tradition than a patriarchal tradition that has been hijacked into local cultural discourse. [...] What is bemusing is that moral condemnation and persecution of non-heteronormative behaviour is often supported by allusion to two texts: laws criminalizing ‘unnatural’ sex and the Bible. Both were introduced via European colonization of Africa, and in the case of the latter, carried in again by a new wave of US-driven Pentecostal evangelism.”<sup>29</sup>

A recent example of an African leader’s very masculinist interpretation of ‘African culture’ was played out in the social theatre around the Jacob Zuma rape trial in April-May 2006. Jacob Zuma, deputy president of South Africa, was charged for rape, the complainant being a young woman with whom he had had sex, allegedly against her will. In his defence Zuma claimed his behaviour, by the young woman defined as rape, to be mainstream Zulu culture, staging himself as “a 100% Zulu boy,” for whom aggressive sexuality is close to an obligation. However as pointed out by Raymond Suttner, it is striking to which extent this Zulu masculinity coincides with ANC militaristic masculine traditions, and also with (extreme versions of) dominant Western patterns of fiercely heterosexual masculinities. “The commonality of patriarchy across cultures was buttressed in this case by drawing on allegedly specific Zulu norms and understandings,” Suttner says,<sup>30</sup> All during the rape trial (from which in the end Jacob Zuma was acquitted) manifestations took place outside the court room with Zulu supporters pitted against South African feminists, Human Rights activists and civil society organizations. It was abundantly evident that Zuma’s version of Zulu culture, including homophobic attitudes (which actually run counter to the South African constitution) had spectacular support among common South Africans – men as well as women. Also in the anti-Zuma manifestations men and women were mixed. Nevertheless the Jacob Zuma rape trial was a model case of ‘African culture’ as a battlefield of gender – not in terms of supporters/contestants being men or women, but in terms of the different visions of power relations of sex and gender at stake.

### ***Women and Politics***

One area, where the push for attention to women’s issues and gender equality has been particularly successful is in the field of political representation. The presence of women in national parliaments in Africa has increased dramatically. According to statistics published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union there has been, in the seven African countries which are among the top-30 in terms of women-in-parliament on a global scale, an increase from an average of 18.3% women in parliament in 1997, to 33.4% in 2007.<sup>31</sup> 33.4% women in African parliaments shared among the top seven African countries is quite a handsome score, compared to the score of the Scandinavian champions (Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark) where the average in 2007 is 41.0%. Also noteworthy is the fact that Rwanda tops the world list in 2007 with 48.8 % women in parliament. In

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<sup>29</sup> Jessica Horn 2006: 13

<sup>30</sup> Raymond Suttner 2007: 8

<sup>31</sup> The Inter-Parliamentary Union: Women in National Parliaments: World Classification, available on [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org), accessed April 2007

addition to gender quotas in national elections, many African countries have instituted so-called national machineries for women, i.e. ministries, directorates, state commissions etc set up in order to deal with women's issues, sometimes combined with 'family' and/or 'children/youth'.

These remarkable achievements reflect the impact of local women's groups and organizations, who with inspiration from the UN World Conferences on women, particularly those in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), returned with demands to their national governments regarding women's representation and regarding national machineries for women. It is also important to realize, however, that a high percentage of women in parliament does not in itself indicate better lives for women on the ground. In a recent African Women's Conference in Accra, Ghana, November 2006, 120 participants from 16 different African countries, representing African women's movements, researchers and NGOs discussing issues of democracy and development, stressed the necessity of "moving from purely representative democracies to more participatory ones," emphasizing the issues of mobilization, organization and influence bottom-up. The women assembled also talked about "utilizing positive aspects of our cultures in liberating and nurturing ways," reclaiming "the long and rich tradition of African women's resistance to patriarchy in Africa."<sup>32</sup> To these women the re-conceptualization of 'democracy' is high on the agenda, as expressed in the need for a new democratic culture.

Women in parliaments have little impact if they are not backed by women's movements outside parliament. Research has shown that even the most elaborate national machinery for women's issues, such as the one in South Africa, has problems in terms of delivery in relation to change in the lives of ordinary women. Seen from a point of view of the presence of gender concerns at government level, the South African national machinery for women is truly impressive, with an Office of the Status of Women (with the mandate to draw up a National Gender Policy), an independent statutory body, the Commission of Gender Equality (tasked to monitor progress in women's equality in the government and in the private sector), Gender Focal Points in different state departments, and for the women in parliament a multi-party women's caucus, and a women's empowerment unit (charged with training and supporting women parliamentarians). In addition there is the Ad Hoc Joint Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women, tasked to oversee the implementation of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action. Nevertheless, in research reported by Amanda Gouws<sup>33</sup>, when assessed at the levels of representation, accountability and delivery, success was only identified at the level of representation, with no impressive results to show at the other levels.

Furthermore, according to some critics, high numbers of women in parliament and elaborate national machineries for women's issues reflect more than anything else African government's agility in terms of responding to trends, fashions and preoccupations in international donor agencies. Also, with more donor-money floating

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<sup>32</sup> Quotes from The African Feminist Forum: Reclaiming our Spaces, Executive summary, [www.africanfeministforum.org](http://www.africanfeministforum.org), accessed March 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Amanda Gouws 2005: 76

into Africa during these last twenty years than ever before, there is a risk of NGOization of the women's movements: Activists turn into wage earners (often with nice international salaries) and NGO accountability turns away from constituency concerns into accountability to donors. In this context agenda-setting becomes an urgent issue: Who determines the range of subjects to be dealt with by organizations funded by donor money? The international donors' agenda, or the demands of local women on the ground? In donor agendas 'gender' is often treated as a separate issue, as an overriding variable of difference and hierarchy, where in actual fact in a local context the difference of gender is of less importance than for instance hierarchies of family, of age, of ethnicity or religion.

### ***HIV/AIDS – a gendered epidemic?***

As the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa is dragging on, the interpretation of patterns of contamination and of how to combat and prevent the spreading of the disease have been changing. It is becoming increasingly clear that gender inequalities is a root cause of the spread of HIV infection, that HIV/AIDS is a gendered epidemic, and that accordingly the combat of AIDS is a feminist issue<sup>34</sup>. The way to curb the spread of the illness is less through individual behaviour oriented ABC campaigns (Abstinence, Be faithful, Condomize – a strategy which is full of moralistic and stigmatizing overtones, and which furthermore has proved unsuccessful)<sup>35</sup>, but rather through struggles for changing gender power relations on the ground: Women must unite to combat sexual violence and women must struggle to enhance their powers of negotiation *vis a vis* husbands and boyfriends in matters of sex.

An additional aspect of the gendered face of HIV/AIDS is the fact that women and girls are physiologically more vulnerable for the infection than men and boys due to anatomical differences. While the biological component contributes to the statistics that show that the majority of new infections occur among young women, the biomedical vulnerability only adds to the fact that the social and political aspects of gendered inequalities make the epidemic a special burden of women. The epidemic does not only affect the carriers of the virus, but families, neighbourhoods, communities and societies as well. Also in this regard, women bear the major impact of the epidemic as the ones in charge of the care of the ill.

The gendered nature of the epidemic, can, however, also be questioned: maybe women are overrepresented in statistics only because the information is often collected through maternity care services, rendering the epidemic among men less visible. This makes AIDS appear as a 'women's disease' thus placing additional burdens on women. Infection rates are important tools of epidemiology and policy making, but their use needs to be constantly problematized as the power of numbers can have unexpected consequences in policies and every-day lives<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> see for example Gilbert & Walker 2002, Epstein et al. 2004

<sup>35</sup> Parker & Aggleton 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Patton 1997.

The most crucial change in the field of HIV/AIDS during the last five years has been the strong introduction of the antiretroviral treatments (ARVs) also in Africa<sup>37</sup>. In mid-1990s new treatment opportunities emerged in the North, changing the scenario of AIDS in a radical way. From a death sentence, HIV has become a manageable chronic illness for those who could access the new drugs. While these drugs are not unproblematic, they are not biomedically controversial but provide mainstream treatment for AIDS patients in the North. They have radically reduced mortality and in-patient rates, and contribute a major shift in quality of life of people living with HIV. For HIV positive women a rather simple treatment was introduced to be used during pregnancy dramatically reducing the risk of the baby to become infected. For rape survivors a prophylactic treatment became available. These developments are potentially a radical change in direction for women in HIV affected communities. While the pricing of these drugs is a matter of global trade regulation and constant controversy, during the 2000s a new consensus has emerged: both HIV activists, NGOs, churches, most governments and international donors and agencies on the HIV field agree that ARVs need to be an element in the HIV policy field even in Africa.

Lately there has been a major political shift and a new commitment to treatment issues in HIV policies among the key players across the political spectrum: the World Health Organization, the Global Fund, and the Gates Foundation, PEPFAR. A growing interest in realities of treatment can be anticipated among scholars too; more, and more detailed, research on ARVs in African contexts is needed. It is however important to note the current disparity between perspectives, some, like the South African government during early 2000s, hesitant about treatment, and some engaged in debates and practices on how to introduce treatment on mass scale. The current consensus, however, seems to be that for the burden of women infected or affected by HIV, ARVs can provide a major change.

### ***Poverty, gender and HIV***

Since the ARVs do not provide a miraculous turnaround in the HIV/AIDS scenario in the near future, many of the old concerns will still be there for women living in affected communities, and for decision makers. HIV/AIDS is tightly linked to social and economic inequalities, to income disparities, poverty, literacy, nutrition, access to health care, migration, political instability and many other power structures, and it is well documented in research that the impacts of these patterns are gendered. Women, however, cannot be seen as a single category and in any homogeneous way more prone to poverty than the category of men, rather, gender, age, social and geographical contexts intertwine in people's lives in a myriad of ways, producing intersections where sometimes gender matters, sometimes other features play a more central role<sup>38</sup>.

The major outcome of diverse research approaches is that HIV/AIDS needs to be understood on many different societal levels, including structural elements of gender equality, health care, education, social policies, NGO sector and democracy. Often HIV policies focus on prevention of new infections in a narrow, behaviour oriented way,

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<sup>37</sup> Jones 2004, de Waal 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell 2003, Poku 2005.

pointing at the individual and community levels. Individual responsibility is essential in health behaviours, but the HIV epidemic cannot be reduced to a sum of sexual acts by individuals. Also the stigmatizing effect of behaviour change paradigm has been documented by many scholars. Furthermore, epidemiology shows that on a societal level HIV/AIDS rates are an outcome of social circumstances where the illness can take epidemic proportions. Social instability, migrant labour as only source of income generating disruptions in family patterns and kinship, low life expectancy due to poverty or war, lack of health services, especially in the area of reproductive health, and low literacy are major key factor, and these work in gendered and gendering ways. In combination with other factors, gender must be taken seriously in research and policies. Gender is central for the HIV epidemic, particularly as the nature of gendered poverty and increasing difficulties in struggles for livelihood cast the theme poverty in a new light.

### ***HIV/AIDS and gender struggle***

At the same time HIV/AIDS has also generated new relationships and mobilized women<sup>39</sup>. Women are visible actors in HIV/AIDS activist movements, in lobby groups, in small-scale groupings organizing prevention literacy, care and support. These groups have shown to provide entry points for new opportunities for social change and hope, thus challenging only negative descriptions of a catastrophic situation<sup>40</sup>. While many groups work in communities they often generate knowledge on inter linkages of different levels of HIV work in local, national and global levels. Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the political agendas and initiatives of the affected communities themselves. Research on local HIV/AIDS policies and especially research on local responses to HIV/AIDS policies could be further strengthened. Such groups provide local interpretations and perspectives, and inhabit competing understandings of situations, therefore providing a wide array of critical and analytical approaches. By listening to these voices new insights are gained in the fight against the epidemic.

### ***Summing up***

The international focus on women and gender in continuation of the UN Decade for Women has vitalized issues of gender in Africa, at the level of states and policy makers – in terms of national machineries for women's issues and women representatives in parliament, and also at the level of political activism and women's organizations. Women are increasingly perceived as important social agents. Concomitantly a focus on men as gendered persons is gaining ground, sometimes combined with a critique of dominant masculinities. The acknowledgement of gender inequalities as a root cause of the spread of HIV infection also points to the importance of challenging male gender power. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is increasingly seen as a gendered epidemic: women and girls are physiologically more vulnerable for the infection than men and boys; women are often the weaker part in sex negotiations, and women bear the major impact of the epidemic as the ones in charge of the care of the ill.

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<sup>39</sup> E.g. Robins 2004, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Ahmat 2004.

The possibility of access to antiretroviral treatments (ARVs) has opened new perspectives: From a death sentence HIV has become a manageable chronic illness for those with access to the new drugs. The possibility of treatment has mobilized men and women to struggles for access to medication, as exemplified in the South African Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) where a majority of the activists are women.

## 5. Uneven globalization: Trade and regional integration

### ***Multilateral Trade liberalisation and Development in Africa***

The issue of development and better distribution of world resources have long been components of the world trading system and it is widely recognised that there is a strong nexus between trade and development. Meanwhile it is hard to refute the fact that international trade can be a powerful engine for a country socio-economic development, the exact nature of the link between trade and development is constantly a subject of controversy within the ranks of academics and policy makers. Over time, the trade and development paradigm has shifted and this is reflected in the changes in the debate in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and subsequently the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The time-honoured and simple models of international trade, which show that unrestricted trade can lead to poverty alleviation in developing economies like those of Sub-Saharan African countries, have been criticised for its simplicity. It is true that in the time since these basic models of international trade were first formulated, major changes have taken place in the world economy. Yet, no model of large scale-economic activity may encompass all the complexity of the true reality.

Some decades ago, the debates on the impacts of outward looking policies on the economic growth and development of African countries were overshadowed by the arguments as to the role of the IMF and World Bank in shaping policies in these regions. But, with the entry into force of the WTO, multiplicity of Free Trade Areas, Africa becoming a new economic frontier for emerging economies like China, India and Brazil and the tendency to alter the traditional way of doing business with Africa by traditional donors and trading partners like France, the UK, the USA etc., academic and policy discourse is now taking a different phase.

While it is true that the share of developing countries as a group in the world trade has increased to around 30 percent in recent years, the share of African countries in world trade has generally stagnated. Although a few oil exporting African countries have done well by way of oil export, a 2005 World Trade Report shows that majority have witnessed decreased of their share in world trade as a result of unfavourable commodity prices. In 2004, Africa's share of world trade was below 3 per cent compared to around 5 per cent in 1980. About thirty-four of the fifty Least Developed Countries (LDCs), are in Africa. The share of LDC's merchandise exports and imports in 2002 amounted to US \$ 38 billion and US \$ 45 billion respectively.

The inability of African countries to benefit from multilateral trade liberalization is a source of concern not only to the African countries themselves, but also to the WTO, who wants to see the benefits of world trading system spread out as evenly as possible. To be sure, the preamble to the WTO Charter recognises the necessity of adopting positive measures "designed to ensure that developing countries, and especially the least developed among them, secure a share in the growth of international trade commensurate

with the needs of their economic development”.<sup>41</sup> Yet, non-governmental organisations, some practitioners and academics who associate the WTO to part of the uneven project of globalisation use the inability of African countries to benefit significantly from the multilateral trading system as a justification for their arguments that the WTO is primarily skewed against the African countries and other poor third world countries. There are now forty-one African countries, which are WTO Members, and seven in the process of acceding. Although the priority of all African countries may not be homogeneous, in terms of clustering, the African countries form the largest bloc of countries at the WTO.

In order to facilitate trade negotiations and to prevent States from opting out of some of the WTO covered agreements, during the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTN) the idea of “Single Undertaking”, was introduced. With the exceptions of the plurilateral trade agreements, the “Single Undertaking” means that countries had to accept all the WTO Agreements as a package. As a consequence, African countries could not seek exemption from trade commitments that were being negotiated. Rather, they could only argue for longer-timeframes for the implementation of the agreements and improved technical assistance to enable them to comply with their commitments and also to diversify their products and expand their markets. With the continuous stagnation of their share in international trade and increased poverty, African countries started questioning the reason for this inability. As a result, they came up with a number of reasons to justify why they are lagging behind. They attributed it to the ineffectiveness of the special and differential treatments, lack of serious implementation of some of the WTO Agreements by the developed countries, especially the Agreements on Agriculture, Textile and Clothing (Multi Fibre Agreement). African countries are also very concern with the fact that they took so many obligations during the Uruguay Round which eventually compromised the policy space they could exercise in order to attract investment and support their economic development and fight against poverty. Here African countries contend that the fact that they had to engage in reciprocal trade concessions with the World richest nations meant that they had to enter into obligations that had nothing to do with the improvement of their economies.

Consistent with Paragraph 44 of the Doha Declaration, African countries have tabled proposals in the current Doha negotiations relating to almost all the WTO Agreements under negotiations and review. In view of the fact that the special and differential treatment in the WTO Agreements are generally of best endeavours, expressed in imprecise and hortatory language and therefore, unenforceable before the WTO dispute settlement, African countries have called for Members to make them legally binding. While there is an urgent need for making special and differential treatments an integral part of the Agreements under negotiations, the need for the reduction of export subsidies and domestic support by the developed countries is even more serious.

To a greater extent, the increased in the benefits of trade liberalization has received more attention at the multilateral trade debates than the decoupling of agricultural subsidies.

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<sup>41</sup> See, The Legal Texts, The Results of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 4.

African countries need considerable financial support in form of ‘aid for trade’, in order to diversify their supply side capacity. Presently, a large part of their economies depend on commodities. For instance, cotton production accounts for 5 per cent to 10 per cent of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali.<sup>42</sup> About two million farmers in the West and Centre Africa produce cotton; accounting to about 30 per cent of total export earnings and more than 60 per cent of total agricultural exports.<sup>43</sup> All these countries are low cost producers as opposed to the cotton producers in the in the EU and the U.S. To the extent that subsidies from developed countries continue to dampen commodities prices in the world market, the benefit of trade liberalisation would remain non-tangible to the African countries. There is an urgent need to keep on fighting for the complete eradication of all forms of trade distorting subsidies on cotton and other commodities and push on the debates towards the assumption of stricter commitments from the developed countries.

Regarding trade-related areas, African countries have also requested the unbundling of the four Singapore issues of competition policy, transparency in government procurement, trade facilitation and investment. On the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2004, African trade and finance Ministers met in Kigali-Rwanda and took a common stand on the Doha negotiations, especially regarding the Singapore Issues. In the so-called ‘Kigali Consensus’ African countries requested Members to drop all the Singapore Issues from the current Doha Development Round negotiations, with the exception of trade facilitation. In the Kigali meeting they insisted that neither a multilateral agreement on trade in investment, competition nor transparency in government procurement would advance the development needs underlining the current Doha negotiations. In reaffirming the desire of the African countries to continue to pursue the negotiation on trade facilitation, they were of the view that, “Trade facilitation has long been recognised by African countries as critical for enhancing the competitiveness of their economies, for promoting intra-African trade and for harnessing the benefits of globalisation”<sup>44</sup>

It is important to note that trade, as an instrument for development and poverty eradication in Africa cannot be overemphasised. World leaders in the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland in 2005 expressed their determination to eliminate discriminatory export subsidies and other trade distorting measures so as to facilitate the integration of African countries into the world trading system. Yet, the effective realisation of Gleneagles’ objective has suffered from lack of political will, thereby, continuously keeping the African countries at the edge of the World trading system. It is to be acknowledged as well that while favourable external environment is needed if African countries are to reap the benefits of their membership to the multilateral trading system, the supply-side constraints and the implementation of appropriate domestic measures by African governments in order to attract investment, must be addressed. As a consequence, if African countries are to compete effectively in the global market, they will need to implement right policies and be supported to tackle their capacity constraints.

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<sup>42</sup> Paola Fortucci, *The Contributions of Cotton to Economy and Food Security in Developing Countries*, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), June 2003.

<sup>43</sup> See World Bank, *Cotton Policy Brief*, June 1999.

<sup>44</sup> See TN/TF/W/33, available at <http://docsonline.wto.org>

### ***The Challenges of Regional integration in Africa***

The problems of regional integration have long been recognised in Africa's political circles. Many decades ago, Nkrumah forcefully stated the case for regionalism in Africa. While different integration mechanisms have been successfully launched by other regions to improve their economic welfare, Africa lags behind with regards to economic growth and general living standards. In spite of the existence of a whole range of regional arrangements and a plethora of policy plans regional integration is yet to be a feature of Africa political economies. The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos were adopted almost three decades ago setting out the vision for an integrated Africa by the beginning of the third millennium. The Lagos Plan envisaged that, via regional economic communities, the challenges of Africa's poverty and underdevelopment would be overcome. Some of the milestones of the Plan included the strengthening of existing regional economic institutions, creation of new ones, tariffs stabilisation and harmonisation of tariffs system across the different regional economic communities. Among the new initiatives is the Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Among the features of the discourse on regional integration in Africa are the absence of political constituencies in the business and labour movements that push for regional integration, lack of focused regional integration and overlapping memberships. With regard to the former, at the domestic constituency, there has not been any real debate on the national costs to benefit integration. At best, it is often some pan-Africa sentiments that provide a modicum of ideological support nationally to intra-Africa rapprochement. The problem of overlapping membership also arise as many African countries currently belong to more than one regional integration arrangement. For instance, in Eastern and Southern Africa alone, there are about seven regional institutions either existing as a FTA or Custom Union. Within this framework, each of the country in both regions belong to at least two regional trade agreement. Yet, apart from the vision of the African Union to achieve common markets among its members, one can hardly find a coordinated plan to harmonise the existing numerous regional integration agreements spread around the continent. Such plan may make sense, as the pursuit of further integration by sub-group would eventually be absorbed by a larger group. The intricacies of the current situation do not make such a scenario easy unless there were to be major rationalization of the existing agreements.

However, it is very clear that what African leaders have not achieved domestically through sound economic development policies would be difficult to achieve regionally. If the vision adumbrated by the first generation of African post-colonial leaders failed to bear fruits, what arguments support the newly found optimism that characterises the present proponents of Africa's integration?

The Asian experience suggests that it is prior public provision of investment in human resources and infrastructure that has led trade. If investment in human resources and infrastructures are in place, the next move would be to establish necessary investment-export link in order to expand existing capacity and market diversification. It would appear Africa's elites are focusing on wrong priorities and show little genuine

commitment towards the goal of Africa's development. If regional integration is to succeed, Africa's political elite would have to go beyond abstract vision and grandeur gestures. They will have to relinquish part of their state sovereignty, which is usually misguided.

Effectively, the following issues need to be addressed; what are the domestic objections or support to the different regional activities? In other words, what are the domestic obstacles in developing sound policies towards African regional institutions? What regional arrangements exist and how can they be revamped? Regionally, sound policies that capture a commitment towards democratisation, upholding the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedom are needed in order to move forward. Furthermore, external actors should also refrain from pushing African countries into North-South and other forms of South-South Free Trade Areas (FTA) without allowing them the breathing space to articulate or conduct impact assessment of such engagements to their long-term economic development. Examples of such engagements are the current FTA being negotiated with the European Commission and different bilateral trade agreements in the process of negotiation between China and some African countries.

### ***Africa's Trade with Europe and Development***

As far as FTA with the European Union and trade preferences are concerned, presently, most Sub-Saharan African countries are either covered by the preferences under the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and or the European Union "Everything But Arms" (EBA) initiative. The former is due to phase out by December 2007 (to be replaced by a reciprocal trade agreement currently negotiated in the context of the Economic Partnership Agreement-EPA) while the latter is only available to thirty-five African Least Developed Countries (LDCs). African countries have in several occasions requested for a three-year extension of the Cotonou preferences in order to get ready for a FTA with the EU. To the extent that their request for additional time fails to materialise, the African countries should be allowed longer period of time for liberalisation. As GATT Article XXIV requires intra-FTA liberalization to be done within a reasonable period of time, the developing members of the African groups should be given at least ten to fifteen years to reduce tariffs on EU exports. At the same time, these preferences seem not to have had any major effect on the African exports. Among other things, the reasons for this can be attributed to non-tariff barriers such as rules of origin, the requirement of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standard as well as other technical barriers attached to the trade preferences. Yet, the protectionism facing African trade has been recently found to be "above the world average in spite of the trade preferences".<sup>45</sup>

Substantial percentage of Government revenue in many African countries is generated through tariffs levied on imports. The EU is the largest trading partners of many African countries. Consequently, the lion's share of this revenue comes from the duties imposed on imports from the EU. With the current EPA debates, there is concern that unless alternative sources of revenue is set in place, wiping out tariffs on imports from the EU could have a damaging impacts on Government revenue in most of the Sub-Saharan

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<sup>45</sup> See Bigsten A. and D. Durevall, (2007) *The African economy and its role in the world economy*, Göteborg, June 7<sup>th</sup>.

African countries. The United Nations Economic Commission (UNECA) for Africa in its 2005 report estimated the scale of revenue losses in Sub-Saharan African countries with the full implementation of EPAs at US \$ 1,951.3 million per annum.<sup>46</sup> This represents a level of income losses, which almost exceeds total annual EC aid disbursement in Africa under the 9<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund (EDF).

With the foregoing scenario, the full implementation of EPA may leads to a large hole in Government revenue. As a result, there may be a need for diversifying trade-based taxes. At the same time, even in the more advanced economies, it is by no means an easy task to design and speedily implement revenue diversification measures. As a solution to this problem, the EU needs to demonstrate greater sensitivity to African concerns over the revenue impacts of EPAs through an accelerated and extended implementation of programmes to support revenue diversification in African countries. The EC would also need to eliminate tariffs on ACP sensitive products in order to meet the demands of the African countries in the current EPAs negotiations.

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<sup>46</sup> WITS/SMART Simulations, cited in “The Economic and Welfare Impacts of the EU-Africa Economic Partnership Agreements”, ATPC briefing No. 6, May 2005.

## Concluding remarks

### ***Africa's Renewal: opportunities, challenges and the road ahead***

As Africa enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it faces mounting challenges as well as new opportunities to shed away the old cliché of “Hopeless Africa” first coined by the Economist magazine in its June 1999 issue. Unlike the 1980s and the 1990s, however, the conditions for Africa’s sustained growth and development are much more favorable today than ever before for four mutually reinforcing reasons. First, despite the social cost of implementing harsh economic reform measures since the early 1980s, many African countries have put in place appropriate macroeconomic, structural and social policies which have contributed to improved GDP growth rates and some progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Overall GDP growth rate has averaged in excess of 4.5 percent annually since the mid 1990s. Some of the fastest growing African economies are on course to meet the income poverty target of halving poverty by 2015.

Second, there is grater consensus among Africans now than ever before on what needs to be done to accelerate growth, reduce poverty and promote sustainable development in Africa. Regional initiatives under the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) are allowing African countries to improve governance; assume leadership and accountability for their development; increase trade within Africa and the world; and enhance the provision of regional public goods such as cross-country transportation and electricity pooling. Most significantly, these initiatives have resulted in a decline in the number of civil conflicts over the last four years from 16 to 6, including progress on such protracted wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Angola. And the African Peer Review Mechanism, under which a country puts itself for scrutiny by their peers to help identify its weaknesses and the actions required to correct them underscores the push for accountability in economic and political governance also fueled by an invigorated civil society. So far, more than 25 countries have voluntarily signed up for the NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the process has begun with a number of reviews. Moreover, there are encouraging signs that the African Union (AU) and regional bodies are playing an important role in dealing with potentially disruptive national crises, as in the Sudan and Somalia.

Third, while Africa itself deserves the credit for much of what has been achieved, the response of its international partners has been valuable and enhances the prospects for the sustaining the progress made so far. In 2005, the international community agreed to double assistance to Africa and to cancel the debt of 14 low income African countries, and the success of the ongoing Doha trade negotiations will be determined in large part by breakthroughs on the issues of particular concern to African countries—the elimination of trade-distorting subsidies in agriculture and the lowering of tariffs and non-tariff barriers for African products. In this context, the Commission for Africa made a compelling case for a “big push” on many fronts to address the interlocking problems standing in the way for successful development to occur in Africa.

Fourth, Africa is already benefiting from China-driven commodity boom and increased investment in infrastructure and the extractive industry sector, followed by investment by India and other East Asian economic powers. Exports are booming and consumer imports more affordable. Net exports of crude oil, woods and precious stones have benefited from strong Asian demand. Financial flows are on the rise as well. China, in particular, has become a large provider of infrastructure loans. Clearly, the rise of the Asian giants which is likely to be long term requires that African countries devise innovative responses to challenges and opportunities it represents. Many questions remain unanswered: how best can Africa benefit from the rise of the Asian giants? What are the risks to economic diversification and transformation? How can these risks be contained?

### ***The strategic challenge: overcoming embedded dysfunction***

While there is good reason to be optimistic about the future, there are still important challenges facing the continent. Africa has the world's highest proportion of poor people (46 percent of the population), and is home to more than 30 percent of the world's poor. It is the region most afflicted by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is reversing the gains made in social indicators over the last four decades in several countries, reflected most dramatically by declining living expectancies and projected drops in total population in the heavily infected countries. The AIDS pandemic is already measurably eroding economic development, educational attainment and child survival—all key measures of national health—in much of Africa. Even the progress towards the MDGs by the best performing countries remains modest at best, and the majority of countries on present trends will take several decades to meet most of the goals.

Across the continent high rates of unemployment, particularly of the youth, who make up more than half of the population in most countries, is not only a major challenge for economic policy makers but has long-term consequences for aggravating inter-generational transmission of downward poverty spirals. Those with the skills, capital, and training needed to take advantage of the opportunities presented by globalization find employment, while those without the necessary attributes drift into the informal economy (underemployment) or become unemployed. Lack of accessibility and mobility for the majority widens the development gap between the haves and the have-nots and leads to declining opportunity in the social, economic and political spheres. Growing social polarization, therefore, leads to a loss of faith in the system, and consequently to conflict, anarchy, looting and self destruction.

Africa's potential renewal is further undermined by the *brain-drain*. The brain drain continues to rob Africa of the skills it surely needs for development. The loss of skilled people will continue to affect the functioning of the institutions of higher learning, industry and enterprises. Moreover, as African societies have become predominantly urban in composition, and demographic aging, coupled with economic welfare, is looming as a significant social issue. The effects of social polarization in the region are becoming more evident as societies undergo cultural and economic restructuring based on the ability to engage with globalization activities.

The task of reviving African economies involves not only getting socio-economic policies right, but also creating a *hospitable political environment*. The key elements of such an environment are political stability, rule-based political order mediated by an impartial and independent judiciary, and good governance, with particular emphasis on transparency and accountability. Notwithstanding the recent shift toward democracy in many African countries since the early 1990s, democracy in Africa is still in profound trouble. The task of strengthening the key institutions of the state, such as the judiciary, legislative and executive branches of government remains problematic. Decentralization of decision-making to local structures and involvement of civil society in the political process in a meaningful way have not taken root.

Of all the titanic shifts that are currently reshaping the socio-cultural landscape in Africa, the ongoing and worsening *degradation of the physical environment* perhaps is the most serious immediate threat to development in the region. Africa's continued focus on resource-exploitation, a condition reinforced by the comparative-advantage logic of globalization, is placing ever-greater stress on ecosystems and local environments. As a result, the daily hazards to human health and well-being such as non-potable water, soil degradation, inadequate sewage treatment, and solid waste removal are not getting the attention they deserve.

In these circumstances, strengthening the foundations for continued growth and prosperity requires African countries strategies and policies to focus on a bold agenda for *economic transformation*. Despite decades of effort by governments and development partners, African economies have undergone little structural change. They still depend heavily on low-productivity agriculture for the bulk of rural employment. For the most part, there has been no Green Revolution in African agriculture. They still possess few linkages with manufacturing. They still export a narrow range of agricultural commodities and natural resources. Such realities have made African countries vulnerable, especially to agricultural and commodity price fluctuations and other external economic shocks. Continuing with more of the same—incremental poverty reduction strategies backed by more aid—will only reproduce and extend existing economic structures. Recovery and sustained growth of agriculture is a pre-condition for economic renewal and social transformation.

### ***Roadmaps to Africa's Renewal: global and local dimensions***

An ambitious and comprehensive approach is needed to tackle the interlocking problems impending Africa's growth and development. This must involve diversification of products and markets, development of skills and human resources, modernization of technology and infrastructure, re-engineering of business processes, creation of incentives for small and medium enterprises to grow and export, improvement of country investment climate, and cultivation of foreign direct investment. Enhancing the investment climate entails government involvement within a wide area of governance—providing security, collecting taxes, ratifying sound economic policies into law, and delivering adequate public services. It also entails supporting the legal and financial institutional framework of the economy. The legal system must uphold order, act as a check on government and protect basic property rights, human rights, and contract rights.

The financial system must promote household savings and channel them to productive enterprises.

This brings us back face to face with the issue of the role of the state in national development. Transformational change that moves African people to a higher standard of living requires the simultaneous, significant participation of the three major drivers of change: the state; the private sector and civil society. Without a healthy cohesion between these three actors, achieving the Millennium Development Goals and building peaceful and democratic societies will remain a dream. Experience shows that countries which have shaped a constructive, mutually supportive relationship between the public and private sectors have been more successful than those who have opted either for the primacy of the market or the predominance of the state.

An effective state maintains good policies and develops credible institutions that are supportive of growth. An effective state also strives for education and health systems which create a productive and skilled workforce, includes civil society in policy dialogue, and invests in the institutional and physical infrastructure to complement private dynamism. Therefore, strengthening state capacity becomes a *sine qua non* for Africa's economic and political renewal.

*At the international level*, the challenge of Africa's economic and political renewal will require a more auspicious international economic environment that would allow Africans to earn their way out of poverty. Key aspects in this regard should include: 'streamlining' conditionality, and bringing to conclusion the Doha Development round of trade negotiations. With regard to the first, the common practice of lending with policy adjustment in the context of crisis management are not adequately governed by a set of policies and indicators that the countries themselves have specified to achieve development outcomes and monitor them accordingly. At the end of the day, for development in Africa to be sustainable, African governments must have the option to choose among appropriate fiscal, monetary, macroeconomic, trade and other economic and social policies without heavy-handed arm twisting by the development partners.

With regard to global trade rules, the big brake for Africa has to come from progress in trade negotiations. One critical area is ending western agricultural subsidy and achieving fair and stable prices for commodities and improving access to African exports. This must be complemented by efforts to strengthen the supply capacity, especially in the area of production, marketing and diversification—to enhance the value-added to commodities through processing and manufacturing. This, of course, must be complemented by domestic measures to overcome constraints in production: access to credit, security of tenure, better transport and storage facilities.

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## Terms of Reference

Cluster 1.

### The New Africa.

#### **A. A new Africa is emerging:**

It has a lot of faces and facets, and the picture is not clear. But we think that we can observe some aspects and some expressions of it, as well as some reasons for it.

- Increased African hope and improved self image or confidence, boosted by improved economy and regional cooperation (AU, Nepad) - efforts to solve African problem by Africans and by African initiatives.
- Democratization processes at different speeds and ease at different levels of society, making people more aware, more critical and more proud, conflicts of interests played out and debated more openly. Pluralism, which also includes extremism. Gradually increased access to information.
- New roles for the State and for civil society, new checks and balances. Organized drivers of reforms emerging – law societies, trade unions, student unions, teachers associations.
- Improved communication, not only between countries and elites but also at grassroots' levels.
- New roles for media, including internet and blogging, and culture, not least films and music both at the local, regional and global scenes/markets. Contributes to self confidence and new identities, in particular amongst youth. Successes of world class football players originating in Africa also contributes.
- Increased interest from the outside world, China, USA, UK, France, Russia, Brazil. A new geopolitical importance. Africa is being “courted”

#### **B. But positive trends are fragile:**

- There is a continuous tension between modernization, new lifestyles and traditions, in particular between (and within) generations, men and women, locals and diasporas, rural and urban areas.
- Tribal groupings still play major roles, undermining or preventing deeper societal democratization beyond formal democracy. Patron-client relations still exist.
- Several governments have ended up in a grey zone of semi-authoritarianism (between democracies and authoritarian government's) – not by default but by design. Gaps between formal democracy (political institutions without appropriate mandates, resources or integrity and substantial democracy create disappointment. It is common for governments to have lots of power *over* or power to *control* rather than having power *to* or *constructive* power
- The role of the state is unclear and its capacity to uphold its basic functions is weak; such as a functioning judiciary, internal security, good governance, upholding HR standards.

- Women are in many aspects left out of the new trends, it is a men's world. The role of women and those of men are still very traditional in many societies, and backlashes are frequent, but so is also progress. The role of women is frequently discussed, but neither the role of men, nor masculinities and sexuality.
- It is a world for the cities, for the urban elite and for emerging middle class.
- Religious extremism is spreading. The fundamentalist Christian versions are focusing on individual salvation, and has its roots in the better off, whereas Islamistic fundamentalist movements have their main roots in the poor strata of the populations and has long term societal and political changes as their objectives, not only salvation of individuals.
- Ethnicity and religion are struggling to be the dominant basis for governance, threatening democracy as the mode of governance.

**C. Which are the main internal and external actors in these areas?**

- African actors (private citizens/families, companies, institutions such as ADB)
- International actors (countries, companies)
- What are the roles of the international community (UN, Bretton Woods etc)
- Of the subregional organizations?
- Of EU?
- Of Sweden?

Their motives and objectives? Their strengths and perseverance?

**D. Format**

The report should not be more than 30 pages

4-5 weeks