

An Alternative Environment and Development Vision for Southern And Eastern Africa

(Note: This paper was written in December 2004 on the eve of a major conference on Environment and Development organised by the Geneva-based International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD). The issues raised in this paper continue to engage governments, academia and social activists).

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Summary: The Rio paradigm of sustainable development is ossifying into a cul-de-sac. The debate must move onto higher visionary plane. The paper analyses Agenda 21 in the context of the emerging geo-political environment, and argues that the Capital-led Globalisation offers no hope for the marginalised and disempowered peoples of the South. However, there are alternative visions. Africa is the global system's weakest chain, and best placed to lead alternative thinking. The paper cites argues that the most creative form of Sustainable Development is Resistance – resistance to the dominant paradigm – and gives concrete examples from Africa to show that this is possible and doable.

Introduction:

This essay seeks to offer an alternative vision for the Southern and Eastern African countries on the strategy to follow on the issue of development and environment. The difference between vision and dream is that the vision has to be grounded in reality; it has to be a bold look into the future but in a doable manner. On the other hand, the doability aspect must not be such that in the name of “pragmatism” the future is trapped into a hole out of which it is impossible to jump.

So then we must begin with the reality, and learn from history.

Part I: The Shattered Dream of Stockholm

It may be imprudent to make a broad sweeping statement of history, but one dares to say that in the last thirty-two years (1972 to 2004), in the battle between the environmental idealists (environmentalists, for short) who sought to create a world where nature and humanity intertwined in harmony, against the profit-seeking world of business (marketeers, for short), the latter has finally triumphed. The environmentalists reached their lowest point at the Environment and Development Conference in Johannesburg in 2002. Here, for example, PPP (Private-Public Partnership) reigned supreme, and the environmentalists were pointedly sidelined. It is ironical that present-day environmentalists nostalgically look back to the “good old vision” of the 1992 Rio Summit as a landmark conference, whereas at the time it was already regarded by many as a compromise between the high ideals of the Stockholm Conference and the mercantile interests of the rich countries.

A. From Idealism of Stockholm to the Compromise of Brundlandt Commission

The high point of global vision on the issue of the environment, it is important to remember, was not the Rio Conference (RC) of 1992, but the Stockholm Conference (SC) of 1972. Stockholm was where the evidence of the toll that the present system of consumption and production had taken on the environment, gathered by decades of scholar-activist-agitator writings and activities, pushed the issue onto the agenda of the United Nations. (See, for example, Carson 1962; Chisholm 1974; Meadows 1972; Kjekshus 1977/96, Gorz 1987; Shiva 1988, 1991; UNCHE 1972). However, from SC it took 15 years for the debate between environmentalists and marketeers to crystallise in a compromise, giving birth to the Brundlandt Report (BR) in 1987.

In the interim Thatcher and Reagan came to power in the UK and the USA respectively. These are historic figures whose impact nobody can discount, for with them began the present phase of “globalisation”. Thatcherism-Reaganism gave a booster to the falling fortunes of the world of business (the marketeers). Faced with threat of recession in the 1980s, they deregulated and liberalised the economy as an act of conscious state policy, in order to expand the economic domain into the social, natural resource and environmental spheres. Paradoxically, the first act of “deregulation” was to regulate the unions in order to lower the pressure for wage demands, and give corporate capital a free rein to recuperate their depressed profits. Gradually, the economy was deregulated so that there was minimum state interference (giving rise to the concept of the minimalist state), creating conditions for the private sector to slowly but surely assume control over the economy, and expand into spheres of society that were earlier regarded as outside the purely economic sphere. Simultaneously came, especially in the UK, measures of privatisation of the social and infrastructural sectors such as transport, energy and later health and education. Then followed liberal pro-corporate taxation policies in the 1980s, then in 1990s the shifting of still more public assets (such as pension funds) to the private sector. Then financial liberalisation and the convergence of national stock exchanges opened the door to round-the-clock transactions in the burgeoning financial and speculative markets. This, in essence, is globalisation, now described by its apologists as if it is something neutral, or God-given, or, in secular terms, a “natural” evolution of history driven by the force of technology.

Late 1980s is also the time when, at the international level, the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations were on the ramp (1987-1994) culminating in the expansion of the GATT to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO set a regime of global trade liberalisation, bringing within its ambit not only agriculture (hitherto outside of the GATT), but also diverse matters including (under the General Agreement on Trade in Services) matters such as transport, communications and potentially everything under the sun (education, energy, water and waste collection), and the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) that effectively put a monopoly of control over intellectual property (patents, copyrights, etc.) into the hands of transnational corporations without acknowledging the provisions of the Convention on Bio-Diversity (CBD). Only these corporations had the capital clout to undertake and apply research and development in areas as far afield as pharmaceuticals, agricultural seeds, pest control and fertilizers. The WTO also set up a sanctions

wielding trade disputes settlement mechanism, and a consensus-based decision-making system that effectively put leverage in the hands of those countries (mainly the US and the EU) that could engineer a “consensus” by combined carrot and stick measures over smaller countries, especially those in Africa and Latin America. The big players (US, EU and Japan) moved quickly from trade liberalisation in goods and services towards demanding the liberalisation of public procurement, and the removal of all restrictions on the movement of capital, and “national treatment” for the owners of capital -- that they be given the same, or better, conditions of operation as nationals in the host countries, including equal or better borrowing facilities from banks, the freedom to move capital in or out of the country and invest where and when they wanted. As some deft observer put it was a “freedom charter” for big capital to move around the world unhindered and uninhibited.

Some of the above developments were still in the future when the Brundtland Report appeared. (UNCSD, 1987). To what extent the Commission was influenced by the undercurrents of Thatcherite-Reaganite neo-liberalism, and the on-going negotiations under the URAs, is difficult to say. The choice of Brundtland to head the Commission was not accidental. She epitomised in her world-view a generally acceptable compromise (within the dominant ideology) between the environmentalists’ idealism and the marketeers’ realism. History chooses its own timely agents. The principal significance of the BR is this compromise. Some dreamers among the environmentalists hailed the BR as “victory”. It was, in fact, a backward step, a retrogression, from Stockholm. The BR was a watered down version of Stockholm, although, on the positive side, it brought in the element of civil society participation. Into the idealism of Stockholm, it introduced the hard realism of the market. From the hindsight of Stockholm, the BR was a compromise in favour of the market.

B. Agenda 21 in the Context of the Emerging Geo-Political Environment

From the BR to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio, it took the relatively short period of five years. By that time, the neo-liberal marketeers were having a heyday, the trade unions were having a hard time, and the URAs were coming to a close. The URAs had begun in 1987 (the same year as the BR appeared), and were primarily negotiated between the US, Europe, Japan and Canada, and towards the end the Australia-led consortium of food exporting countries (the Cairns Group). The developing countries (DCs) counted among them a few big countries such as India and Brazil, but they had very little influence over the final outcome. Indeed they were led to believe that by compromising on matters such as TRIPS for example, they would get market access for things like agriculture and textiles, a “concession” that proved to be illusory. Africa did not matter; it was hardly even physically present during the negotiations. (The only exception was when Ethiopia participated in the TRIPS negotiations, but its outcome was not satisfactory, and Ethiopia did not join the WTO). However, the URAs were signed, in mocking irony, in the African city of Marrakesh in 1994.

The 1980s was the decade when the European Economic Community (EEC) was gaining strength as a customs union leading, haltingly but surely, towards the formation of the European Union (EU) with common economic, trade and later monetary policy. In the URAs, the EEC (later EU) negotiated as a bloc, giving its members a clout that each member, singly, did not have when negotiating with a giant

like the USA. Soon, under the WTO, the EU was to put on the agenda the dismantling of the “preferences” that it had “given” to the African, Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) countries under the Yaounde and later Lome Conventions. Until the 1990s Europe was mainly interested in cheap African raw materials and the Yaounde-Lome Conventions provided for that. After the 1990s, the issue of the market access loomed large. The EU was now seeking to dismantle all barriers to trade liberalisation in the ACP countries. Lome was replaced by the Cotonou Agreement, based on “reciprocity” in conformity with, the EU argued, the “WTO principles”. The “special and differential” (S&D) treatment clauses in the URAs soon became matters of further “negotiation”. In effect this meant that for an effective application of the S&D principles, the industrialized countries demanded of the DCs further “concessions”. These principles now lie in a closed box of the WTO as parts of the so-called “implementation issues”. The DCs had made a great effort at getting these implemented at the Fourth WTO Conference in Seattle in 1999, and again at Doha in 2001, but their attempts were effectively rebuffed. The S&D received ritual mention in the Doha Ministerial Declaration. For all practical purposes the S&D and the Implementation Issues are dead, though not yet cremated. In the meantime, larger issues with profound consequences for the DCs (such as the four Singapore issues) came to the fore. The DCs have little time, energy, skill or capacity to remain united to fight off the burgeoning agenda of the WTO, leave alone defend the ignored principles like S&D and the now all but forgotten “best endeavour” development provisions of Chapter VII of GATT. (see Das, 1998, 1999)

The 1980s was also the decade when, at another level, the Soviet Union, as we later learnt, was in disarray and close to collapsing. It was not party to the URAs. But already five years earlier, the Berlin Wall had fallen, the Soviet Empire had collapsed, and neo-liberalism, already triumphant at the economic level, was now reigning supreme also at the global political level in the name of “liberal democracy”. The rest of the world (including the new Russia) was asked not only to trim its economic sails to the winds of neo-liberal economics, but also to mimic Western representative (as opposed to participatory or communal) style of governance. There was now no counter to the power of the West, led and directed by a single hegemon. Some neo-liberal ideologists were so moved by the West’s triumph that they even proclaimed “the end of History”. 9/11 had not happened yet, and the hubris of the West, especially the US, was intact and reaching the skies.

The Rio Conference took place in 1992 before some of the above had happened. But in the long movement of history events get connected in an uneven chronological order, or in a parallel motion, or one after the other, one overshadowing and influencing the other. It is not inconsequential that Rio took place in 1992, the WTO came into being in 1994 (after negotiations leading to it had begun in 1987), the EEC evolved into the EU in 1995, and the USSR collapsed in 1989. The 1990s was also the decade when, with the cold war behind it, the West felt it had no longer any obligation to kowtow to the third world countries, especially those in Asia, for fear of communism. When Thailand, followed by Indonesia and South Korea, faced a serious economic crisis in the wake of financial meltdown in the speculative market in 1997/98, the West quickly moved in to “restore stability”. Among other measures, the West forced deregulation on the Asian countries, and opened their assets to foreign ownership. The effects of these measures were most remarkable in South Korea, where thousands of workers were put out on the street, and assets were stripped and

practically handed over at hugely discounted prices to corporations and banks from the US, the EU and Japan. Korea was more or less colonised.

The full impact of the changes that were to come later was not yet felt on the UNCED process. And yet, anticipated by and as happened with the BR, Rio was a further concession to the marketeers. Ironically, once again, some die-hard optimist environmentalists hailed Rio, like the BR, as “victory”. In sympathy with them one could at least say that the principles they espoused – the polluter pays principle, precautionary principle, participation principle, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibility – were duly acknowledged at Rio. The real thrust of Agenda 21, however, was its Chapter 2. After ritual incantations about sustainable development, the need for debt relief, commodity price stabilisation, development aid of 0.7% of GDPs, technical assistance, addressing supply side constraints of the LDCs, diversification of small country economies, and other such well-worn platitudes, the Chapter endorsed what really mattered as far as the West was concerned, namely (see UNCED, 1992):

”2.10. Accordingly, the international community should:

- (a) Halt and reverse protectionism in order to bring about further liberalization and expansion of world trade, to the benefit of all countries, in particular the developing countries;
- (b) Provide for an equitable, secure, non-discriminatory and predictable international trading system;
- (c) Facilitate, in a timely way, the integration of all countries into the world economy and the international trading system;
- (d) Ensure that environment and trade policies are mutually supportive, with a view to achieving sustainable development;
- (e) Strengthen the international trade policies system through an early, balanced, comprehensive and successful outcome of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations.”

Rio endorsed a fuller “integration of all countries into the world economy and the international trading system” within the framework of the anticipated URAs. From the URAs, however, were excluded, for all practical purposes, the countries of the South, even as they were meeting in Rio. Nothing mocks the past as much as a truth revealed about it from hindsight. Even as the South and the environmentalists were rejoicing at the “triumph of Rio”, the real flags of victory were flying at the mast of the marketeers. The high idealism of Stockholm, already watered down by the BR, was now at the mercy of the marketeers, as indeed a few years into the WTO was soon to reveal.

C. Post-Rio Shift From Environmentalism to Justice in Trade

Thus came the era of the WTO and another decade of battle between environmentalists and marketeers. It was, however, a strange battle. The third world governments and global environmentalists, in an uneasy alliance at Rio, now fell apart. During the next five years from the first Conference of the WTO in Singapore in 1994 to the fourth in Doha in 2001, the Northern NGOs made alliance with their governments to get the environment under the sanctions regime of the WTO. Insecure about the unimplementability of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), the environmentalists sought the aid of the sanctions apparatus of the WTO to “give teeth” to the MEAs. They proposed, among other things, that the processes by which things are produced should be a matter of concern for the WTO. If they were produced using environmentally-damaging methods, then these must be subjects of action within the WTO, and if necessary, of disputes settlement. These PPMs (Products, Processes and Methods) became a matter of heated debate between the environmentalists and third world governments. The latter smelled danger in the extension of the remit of the WTO to the processes of production as these could become weapons in the hands of protectionists in the West to close their doors to exports from developing countries on grounds that these goods were produced using environmentally unsound methods.

The Southern governments during this period came closer to their development NGOs and distanced themselves from their environmental NGOs. The latter interestingly were generally on the side of their Northern partners from whom they took their cues (as well as funds). In the same vein, most labour unions in the South, especially those in Africa, took their cue from the International Federation of Trade Unions (ICFTU), insisting that their governments abide by their commitment to the core labour standards, or face the wrath of the WTO. While the debate on labour standards is still smouldering, the environmental debate has matured into incorporating the development imperative.

It was not too long before the truth of what the Southern governments and the developmental NGOs were saying began to dawn on the justice and fairness minded NGOs and peoples’ movements in the North. And soon “justice” in trade *linked* with an environmental perspective (rather than the environment in and for itself) became the clarion call of many Northern as well as Southern NGOs. This newly formed alliance made some impact at the Third WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999 when the combined forces of DC governments inside the Conference and anti-globalising protestors outside blocked the Western countries’ efforts to impose a fast-track trade and investment liberalisation programme on the South. Following the debacle of Seattle there was a period of intensified conflict between on the one hand Western governments (aided by the WTO Secretariat), and on the other hand Southern governments (aided by a number of fair-trade and environment-based NGOs, both North and South). Environmental NGOs now argue that the WTO should be accountable to environmental concerns as, for example, expressed in the MEAs, rather than apply the WTO sanctions to disputes arising out of these concerns.

Seattle, however, was reversed at Doha two years later. At the fourth WTO Conference, Western governments and the marketeers re-established their control over its outcome. The South was forced (against the background of 9/11 and the “war on terror”) to agree to put on the agenda a number of issues (such as the four

Singapore issues of Competition Policy, Investment Policy, Government Procurement and Trade Facilitation), as well as the issue of environmental goods.

This was done largely under pressure from the EU which wanted market access on environmental goods to placate its own industrialists. Paragraph 31 endorsed the “mutual supportiveness of trade and environment”, and without extending the remit of the WTO on the MEA, it asked the MEA Secretariats and the relevant WTO committees to work out “procedures for regular information exchange” and “the criteria for the granting of observer status” to each other. However, underlying these seemingly friendly homilies lay the cruel fact that the spirit of Stockholm was now truly dead and buried. Whatever was left of it was placed in the commodity sphere with paragraph 31 clearing the deck for “the reduction or, as appropriate, elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to environmental goods and services” – potentially a market of billions of dollars of all sorts of undefined items. The environment was finally commoditised at a time when the environmental goods were facing decreasing returns in the North and increasing returns in the South. With this the marketeers, who had the power of capital and big state power behind them, firmly re-established their hegemony over the environment. After Doha, the fate of the 2002 WSSD in Johannesburg was more or less sealed. Although the environmentalists fought a hard battle there, the net outcome was none too satisfactory. With PPP the co-optation of the state into the commodification of the environment was officially sealed.

This is not to say that all was lost. The environment movement has had a definite impact on some aspects of life in some countries. (See Rifkin 1991; Repetto 1994; Shiva 1995; Grove 1995; Laferty 1996; Wapner 1996; NGLS 1997; RAFI 1997; Mooney 1998). At least in the West there are political parties that call themselves “green” parties. Whether they have changed the nature and content of politics is a moot point.. Most of the green parties in Europe appear, in the name of “realism” or pragmatism, to have succumbed to the market ideology. The market has proven to be stronger than the green vision. Similarly, some of the processes, for example, in the World Bank and other institutions, appear to at least pay respect to the green ideology and have built environment impact assessments into their project feasibility and operational guidelines. (See World Bank, 1994; UNEP, 1995) Whether this has transformed the way they have continued to commoditise nature is again a moot point. It would appear that their ritual bowing down to the environment is more lip-service than real change. The signing of the Kyoto Protocol on the Climate Change by Russia has finally cleared the road for its implementation, but this is unlikely to change the pattern of consumption and commodification of energy. The market for “energy credits” is designed to enable the rich countries to continue to consume energy as before, while the poor countries are now at the mercy of the rich on the price they secure for selling their energy “surplus” on the “free energy market”. By this mechanism, the carbon cycle – forest, wetlands and arguably air -- is also now commoditised. There have been real gains in some parts of the industrialised world in terms of cleaner air, water, and habitat, but the South continues to wallow in poverty and squalor, and the Americans have lived up to the hubris of Reagan – “the American life-style is not for negotiation”. They continue to consume oil and other products of nature at twice the quantity and speed of the Europeans and twenty times those of the average Africans.

This is where matters stand at this point in time.

D. Lessons from the Environmental and Broader Experience

One is obliged to conclude that from the SC in 1972 to the WSSD in 2002 (30 years to be exact), the tables have been turned against the environmentalists' vision, and at the end of the Doha WTO Ministerial and the WSSD there is an almost complete victory of the marketeers. Instead of nature and the human system of production and consumption in mutual harmony, we are back to *before* Stockholm, back to the unmitigated, even callous, exploitation of nature to satisfy the profit drive of corporations, and the greed of the rich consumers of whom the vast majority live in the North. The neo-liberal ideology is globally triumphant (for now). It has put the global market at the centre of all things – of trade, finance, development, water, health, education, energy consumption, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the biosphere, and the environment generally. The Capitalist market is a formidable force. Instead of changing, it changes everything it encounters in its path.

The lesson to learn from the last thirty years experience is that the globalised market, however, does not function on its own. It functions because there are powerful interests behind it. These are, on the one hand, the TNCs at the top of the hierarchy to the smallest retailer driven by the profit incentive. On the other hand is the power – military as well as political – of some of the mightiest countries the world has ever seen. These are backed by mainstream well-resourced academic institutions. However, as Western economies get into deeper and deeper quagmire (with now speculative capital overshadowing productive capital) they need to expand beyond borders to maintain their profitability. This is the Empire – the Empire of the transnationals backed by the power of the USA, Europe and Japan, and by institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO. (See Amin 2004).

History, however, teaches us that no social system lasts for ever. In the triumph of the capitalist market over the socialist model offered by the now defunct Soviet Union, one would be forgiven for thinking that Capitalism must be the most “natural” way of organising society. As Thatcher would have us believe, “There is no alternative” (TINA). But this is part of the ideology of the market – its claim to universality and permanence, and its challenge to anybody who comes up with alternative visions. “There is no other extant political-economic system, ergo there cannot be one” – this is the argument of the triumphalists. But even today under the shadow of the dominant capitalist system, there is the extant example of Cuba that by its very presence discredits the view that the capitalist system is the only “natural” order of organising the affairs of humankind.

Alternative visions to capital-led globalisation will not come from the West/North. This is not to say that there are no visionary people there. The reality is that ordinary people in the North, however unhappy they might be with their private lives, are afraid, by and large, to experiment with change. Workers and women in the West may struggle, but they live relatively better material lives than their brothers and sisters in the South. Ordinary people are protected from the worst aspects of capitalism by their states, such as, for example, subsidies to small farmers in Europe and America. People in the North are therefore vulnerable to manipulation by their states, the dominant ideologies, and the media. A simple invocation of threat of the “impending invasion” by the Mexicans, the Turks or the Africans from across the

Mediterranean or the Rio Grande shuts them up into “fortress Europe”, or “fortress America”, and improves the electoral fortunes of some of the most reactionary political parties in the West. Now, after 9/11, the security threat is played up by their governments and media to such a pitch that rational discourse with ordinary people about for example “the Arabs” or “the Muslims” is almost impossible.

Nonetheless, there are peoples’ movements and many NGOs in the North that regularly challenge the ruling orthodoxy of the market, and pull down security scarecrows raised by their governments. An ironical but positive outcome of the last three decades of struggle in the area of sustainable development is that many Northern NGOs are coming down from their moral high-ground environmentalism. They have now a better understanding of the nature of the system they are up against, and are seeking alliances in the South. Many have shifted ground from environmental purity to values such as equity and justice in the global trading system. Thus, despite the collapse of the Stockholm spirit, we now have a better and more common globalist perspective of what can be done to challenge the hegemony of capital-led globalisation. (See Malhotra 2003)

The last thirty years of the environmental experience has also provided deeper insights into the character of the United Nations and the role it can play. Some had exaggerated notions of what the UN could do. Now most people in the environmental movement know better. The UN is not world government. It is a forum for compromises, mirroring the global balance of forces. When matters come to a crunch, the hegemons dictate terms. And this is what happened at Rio (and arguably at all other major conferences of the decades of 1980s and 1990s). On the other hand, the principle of universality – even if often discounted and abused in practice – is an important principle that gives peoples’ movements a stamp of legitimacy and a measure of credence at the global level.

Part II: An Alternative Vision of Sustainable and Democratic Development for Southern and Eastern Africa

A. The Future from the Eyes of the Past and the Present

It is relatively easy to see the past putting its weight on the present, but the true test of analysis is to be able to see the past and the present project their light (or shadow) into the future. The challenge is to be able to talk to the generation(s) unborn, sensibly and realistically.

The future is of course inscrutable. But while it is practically impossible to predict actual events, it is not impossible to discern broad trends to make educated predictions about the future. For example, 9/11 could not have been predicted as a single event. But anybody with a reasonably good historical insight should not have been surprised that it happened. The Arab governments with massive oil wealth have been autocratic extensions of Anglo-American power for ninety years (Saudi Arabia became a British protectorate in 1915); American hubris has increased a thousand fold since the fall of the Berlin Wall; and Palestine remains a den of inequity. None of all this justifies 9/11. But one would have to be pretty blind not to see this kind of thing coming. After all, there were precursors of 9/11, such as the bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

B. Why Capital-led Globalisation Offers No Hope For the Poor of Africa

One would have to be blind also not to acknowledge that the Capitalist system is inherently polarising – the rich become richer and the poor poorer. The Biblical insight that unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him (Luke 19:26) is more true of the capitalist epoch than any other previous production systems.

In developed capitalist countries this polarising tendency is countered by state intervention through the provision of, for example, welfare support and state subsidies. In African (and other Third World) countries these safety valves do not exist, or cannot reach out to the masses. (A recent tragic example of this was the horrendous death and devastation caused by tsunami waves in the Indian Ocean region on 27 December 2004. Clearly, governments in the region had given low priority to investment in early warning systems and response mechanisms). Small farmers all over the world are hard pressed by the cereal and food corporations that control seeds, fertilisers, technology, market and credit. But whereas a French or an American farmer will get protection from the state in the form of subsidies (even direct cash handouts), there is no protection for the African small farmer. So the inherently polarising tendency of Capitalism makes the poor farmer in Africa poorer, the poor farmer in Europe or America rescued by the state, and the corporations like Cargill richer. There is no real mystery about the UNDP's finding (See UNDP's 1992 landmark report, pages: 95, 97, 105, 106) that there is a widening gap between the rich and poor nations, and between the rich and poor within nations, and that there is a real transfer of wealth from the South to the North. It is the law of Capitalism.

Capital led globalisation is not a neutral expansion of a system of technological development and economic growth that will “eventually” reach Africa. Superficially, the extensive reach of the Internet and the mobile phone, among other things, gives the impression that Africa is becoming a part of the global village. The reality, however, is more complex. These instruments of communication and outreach are simply the extended arms of global capital to improve the system of Africa's continued exploitation. In the colonial times the Empire had to build ports and develop the banking system, for example, so that the resources from Africa could be exploited and externalised more efficiently and expeditiously. Then, when unknown diseases spread to the humans and cattle in Africa, the West brought their medicines to cure them. It is the same today with the mobile phone, the improved banking system, the automated technology and the AIDS medications. For Africa, globalisation is not, as some people say, a “mix of good and bad”; it is simply catastrophic. Under capital-led globalisation Africa will not get out of the poverty trap. Instead, it would further broaden and deepen Africa's poverty.

C. The Colonial Template Casts Dark Shadow into the Future

The colonial system hangs like a millstone. Touch property rights, for example, and the wrath of the Empire (Anglo-American and European) is unleashed with fury and vengeance. All hell breaks loose -- targeted sanctions; one-sided global reporting by

Western press and Western-controlled-and-financed African media; fuelling of internal dissension in the name of “human rights”; charges of corruption as prelude to imposing conditions of “good governance”; withholding of aid, capital flows, fuel, and technology; incessant pressure from the IMF, the World Bank and the donor community to liberalise and open the markets; and so on.

South Africa, the biggest and the richest country in the region, has been a disappointment to the poor who had thought that liberation from *apartheid* would put them on the other side of poverty. The reality, as always, is one step this side of wishful thinking. The transfer of power did not change the essential character of the economy or the state. On the contrary, among other things, it entrenched property rights within the Constitution. The ANC government had promised to transfer 20% of the lands to the poor landless within the first five years. After ten years, barely 2-3% of the land has been transferred. The fear of “sending wrong signals” to foreign capital is arguably the main reason preventing South Africa from carrying out land reform, just as it did in Zimbabwe for twenty years. The landless in South Africa now look enviously at Zimbabwe. Here, the land reform did take place, though belatedly, violently and haphazardly. Nonetheless, an additional 130,000 small-holders now possess land (a fact not well publicised), as well as additional 3,000 black commercial farmers (creating the racket about corruption) in place of the former 4,000 white farmers that on an average cultivated only 30% of the land. The current appalling state of the economy is a combined result the IMF-inspired Economic Structural Adjustment Programme imposed in 1990, premature trade liberalisation that deindustrialised the country and threw thousands out of job, poor management of the economy, poorer implementation of the much delayed land reform, and an undeclared war of sanctions by the Empire. (See Tandon 2000).

Botswana is often cited as a model of democratic development. Few, however, know the side effects of capital-led development. One of these is that cattle have vastly increased at the cost of wildlife -- beef is a major export product. There is an “enclosure movement” that drives wildlife out of their habitat to make space for cattle. Wildlife migrates in search for water only to find their path obstructed by 8 feet fences. Under threat is also one of the world's largest wetlands in the world -- the Okavango Delta. Eco-tourism has been proposed as a means to save wildlife, but it is a major threat to the local people (e.g. in Chobe). Cattle are concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy families (about 5,000). Meanwhile, the San and Bushmen in the north scrounge for water and grazing for their diminishing cattle. (See Good 1993).

At the regional level, South Africa has signed a free trade agreement with the EU that allows the latter to export subsidised beef to it. This beef finds its way into Botswana (as well as Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland) disrupting the local market and the cattle industry. Botswana is lucky that it has diamonds. But the diamonds are for the rich. The poor are getting poorer (Botswana has one of the highest rate of AIDS), and the natural environment is getting devastated.

Zambia, to take another example, faces a deeper crisis. Before colonialism, the Northern Province was part of the Bemba Kingdom. The Bemba practised shifting cultivation called "*chitemene*". They also fished, hunted, and engaged in blacksmithery, skilled handicrafts, and environmental conservation. They used amply endowed local resources: wild life, skins, iron, ivory, forest wood, tree roots, clay,

grass, etc. When colonialism "integrated" the Bemba into the global economy, it killed the local economy; it deliberately discouraged agriculture to release labour for the copper mines. Thus, Zambia became a mono-commodity producer. Copper, however, was a diabolic gift of capital-led globalisation. In 1968 when copper prices plummeted, the Zambian economy also plummeted. (See Moore and Vaughan 1994).

The African state is sometimes described as authoritarian. This is true only with respect to the local population. When it comes to dealing with the IMF, the WB and the donors it is weak. Under unrelenting pressure from them, the African state has systematically disowned practically all its economic functions. Under SAPs, the African state has withdrawn price controls, closed down marketing boards, liberalised trade and capital flows, privatised public assets, removed subsidies for health and education, and left people defenceless against the juggernaut of capital-led globalisation. Left without state help, the people have descended into a morass of poverty, which unthinking people in the West blame on one thing -- "corruption".

Major land reform and the national repossession of the mineral wealth are precluded by the power and interest of the landowning oligarchy and global corporate capital. To attract the elusive FDIs African governments are racing to the bottom on environmental and labour standards. The result is that African countries are in deep economic crisis -- unchanged structure of mineral and raw materials exports with diminishing returns; declining terms of trade; a debt overhang that negates "aid" transfers; net reversed capital flow out of Africa to the industrialised countries. To cap it all, at the social level, the poor are getting poorer, and in strongly patriarchal societies, impoverished women find themselves at the bottom of the pile, struggling to survive in an increasingly harsh environment.

D. Resistance as a Form of Sustainable Development

The dispossessed and disempowered have discovered that when governments fail them, they have no option but self-help. Here are a few examples (See Tandon 1995).

The first one is from Botswana. In the outskirts of Gaborone a group of women, facing the perennial problem of food shortage, got together in 1984 and formed a club - Thusano Lefatsheng. ("Lefatsheng" is land, and "Thusano" is to help each other). In their small farm, they began testing veld crops, such as the Morula fruit, Morula kernels, Morama tubers and Morama beans. The Kalahari Devil's Claw plant, a naturally growing medicinal plant, was cultivated and processed to provide a self-reliant means to treating some of the common ailments. The women keep small animals, especially goats, which feed on the remains of these crops and provide manure for the soil. The group organised the cultivation, harvesting, purchasing, processing and marketing of these indigenous veld plants, providing employment for women -- by 1989, 1,500 harvesters and 10 processors -- mostly from very poor areas. All group activities are collective. The products are marketed through local markets in Gaborone and nearby areas.

The second example is from Zambia. In early 1991, in the village of Ngulula in the North, a group of about 20 women started a "Research Club" to find practical ways to increase their food production. The first crop they tried was potatoes. This may seem

surprising to those who do not know what copper did to agriculture in Zambia. The women had to learn agriculture, starting from near zero knowledge. Their grandmothers had this knowledge; they didn't. The women started making natural compost out of the remains of their crops, chicken manure, and earth worms. They saved and tested the seeds from the previous crop. "We place them in water, those which sink are fertile and those which float are infertile." They mixed stored seeds with ashes to increase their life span. When the author visited the farm in June 1993, the Club had started doing research on Soya beans. They had started building water canals from a nearby river (a river "which never dies") leading to their vegetable gardens. First they cleared an used primary canal of weed and silt using their own labour and hoes and buckets. Then they began cutting secondary canals sometimes through hard terrain of rock and bush. Once the canals were dug, they opened the sluice connecting the canals to the main canal. They said they had already dug some 20 kilometres of such canals, and were still digging more as new members, excited by the prospect of running water, were joining the Club. The "Water Committee" regulated the flow of water, and organised labour to clear the canals of weeds and silt ... and significantly of cholera. They now raise fish, feeding it a variety of nutrients from their gardens and chicken manure. Their example is spreading in neighbouring villages through which the river passes. The Club is now propagating the virtues of the traditional *Chitemene* agriculture. This system was caricatured in western "scientific" journals as the "slash and burn" agriculture. Africans were accused of being irresponsible and wasteful of resources. This was not so, the Ngulula members explain. It was a carefully regulated system of 4-year rotation of crops over land which was then left fallow for 7 years to allow for natural regeneration of indigenous forestry and restoring soil fertility. "And we didn't burn trees indiscriminately," the women protested, "we saved the *Mukwa* trees which gave us the hard wood out of which our men made the moulds for pounding millet and drums for themselves; we saved the fruit trees -- *Masuku*, the *Mafungo*, and the *Mupundu* -- and we saved medicinal trees and shrubs. The settlers criticised our system only because they wanted to take our land."

The third example is from Zimbabwe. In the Dande Valley, close to the borders of Zambia and Mozambique, live the descendants of the great Mutapa dynasty which, under the legendary Nyatsimba Mutota, migrated from Great Zimbabwe northwards in search of salt some 500 years ago. Colonial laws had deprived the people access to their natural resources - wild life, forests and fish. The animals were put into "game reserves", the forests were given out as concessions to companies based in Harare, and fishing was reserved for tourists. Their traditional activities of livelihood were criminalised. Harsh punishments were meted out to those caught "poaching" (called "hunting for sport" when the colonialists engaged in it). Thus deprived of their basic means of sustenance, most able-bodied people in the Valley were forced to flee from it and become "migrant labourers" in the neighbouring white commercial farms and mines. In the Valley, when the drought strikes (a frequent phenomenon), the poorer people compete with monkeys for roots and fruits.

In mid-1980s, a group of men and women went to the spirit media for guidance. The daily lives of the people continue to be influenced by their spiritual origins, especially in respect of production rituals, rain-making and witchcraft. Like gods of classical Greece, the *mhondoro* spirits intervene in the destinies of the living, taking sides on important issues of the day, guiding the people in many subtle ways. When a medium

(man or woman) is possessed of the ancestral spirit, they say *svikiro inobatwa nemidzimu*, meaning the *midzimu* (ancestral spirit) speaks through his or her medium (*svikiro*). Thus it was that the *chimurenga* (liberation war) against the illegal regime of Smith was fought not only by the living but also by the spirits of *mhondoro*.

After independence, the spirits advised the people of the Valley to resist the ways of the white man (even if these were now enforced by black rulers), to avoid using chemical fertilisers that kill the soil, and to look for traditional foods. Among the foods the women rediscovered were *mupama*, *guruhwu* and *mhanda* (substitutes for maize), *manyanya* (substitute for onions), *musangwi* (seeds boiled for relish), *karememberembe* (baobab leaves cooked with okra) and *mawuyyu* (baobab fruit porridge), *masawu* (like berries to make alcoholic drink), *musiga*, *hakwa*, *katunguru* and *bwabwa* (traditional fruits). Their men began to defy laws that prohibit hunting and fishing. They fished secretly using the traditional methods and hunted animals at nights. If caught they become criminals by law. But the people do not think they were doing anything wrong. The whole psychology, the whole being, is in revolt. What they do is not simply a manifestation of "survival strategy" that sociologists write about; more than that it is also a manifestation of the spirit of "resistance" against unjust laws.

In another part of Zimbabwe, in Masvingo, one such spirit medium, Lydia Chabata, founded the Association of Zimbabwe Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC). Its members protect sacred mountains (especially the High God cult of the Matopo Hills, which Cecil Rhodes had profanely desecrated), water resources, marshlands, and wild life. They preserve *Rambakutemwa* (sacred forests where spirits reside), and grow indigenous trees (baobab, mahogany, *muzeze*, *mukamba*, *muchecheni* and *mutondo*) and fruits. Over the years, AZTREC has planted 700,000 seedlings of indigenous trees, and distributed these to widely scattered rural communities (much like Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai has been doing in Kenya).

E. Why the Economists Have got it All Wrong

Western-trained economists and political leaders say that Africa will get out of the poverty trap if only its governments follow IMF advice and restructure their economies and become competitive in the globalising markets, as some countries in Asia have apparently achieved. More recent evidence contradicts this view. One view now holds that those Asian countries that did break the poverty trap did so by following policies opposite to those suggested to them (and to Africa) by the IMF "experts".

Another group of advisers argue that Western countries should give Africa aid (financial handouts), relieve their debt burden, and improve their terms of trade. They argue that African governments should control corruption, democratise their governance, and create better conditions to attract FDIs that will help build Africa "supply side" so that Africa can compete in the globalising market. All this sounds "sensible". But the last fifty years of experience shows that this is a grotesque illusion. The 0.7% of rich countries' GDP as *aid* for Africa is a target set by the West, not by Africa. This was done decades ago, and endorsed at Rio in 1992. This self-pledge will never be fulfilled (except by a handful of donors). In any case, aid will not and

cannot be the salvation for Africa. It is essentially an instrument of control in the hands of the donors – as Uganda, for example, is now discovering. As for *debt relief*, whenever it occasionally takes place, it is an exercise in public relations. Africans may demand debt cancellation. But it will never happen. The only way is collective unilateral debt abrogation, for no individual African country can do it on its own without facing sanctions from the West. *Trade*, on the other hand, can, theoretically, be a means for Africa to earn from its exports. However, the terms of trade are terribly skewed against Africa, and they are not likely to get better under globalisation. Indeed, why should the West improve the terms of trade for Africa? Capitalism, after all, is not based on charity. As for *FDIs*, these are the biggest hoax of the contemporary era. Foreign direct investments are exactly what they say they are – namely, a means to transfer domestic or national assets to ownership by foreign corporations. The odd thing is that Africa's land and resources (fuel, minerals, etc) are already more or less owned (or controlled) by foreign enterprises or individuals. The task of the moment for Africa is to turn these foreign assets into democratically or publicly managed national assets, rather than hand over what little is left in national hands over to foreign companies.

Development is more than economics. It incorporates human rights, community rights, and the right to national or regional self-determination, and it seeks to address issues of equity and fairness in the distribution of resources at the national, regional and global levels. At the national and regional levels, the provision of social services – such as water, energy, health, transport and education – should be the responsibility of the state and other legitimate stakeholders, and not left to market forces (as now). Social services are not matters to be privatised or commoditised; they are parts of the basic human rights of the people, and a people's state would be responsible for the provision of these services. In other words, the state has to be not only a *development* state, but also an *ethical, accountable and responsible* state.

Development, as the spirit medium Lydia Chabata told the author in an interview, means empowerment of the people (See Tandon 1995). You cannot do so without restoring the wholeness of the community, and integrating the life of the people with their natural environment. The environment has been destroyed or profaned by decades of colonial rule. You have to restore it so that the spirits of the ancestors are at peace. Otherwise there can be no development. Development does not come with western experts, or with foreign science and technology. These must be created by the people in the process of living in harmony with nature. This means interpreting traditional responsibility (stewardship) towards nature and ancestral spirits in the present context, and the mobilisation of rural communities to develop self-reliant and self-resourced projects.

F. Resistance and Selective Disengagement from Capital-led Globalisation

Time has come for Africa to resist and selectively and systematically disengage itself from capital-led globalisation. It is the only route left for Africa. This does not entail a permanent break; nor a break in all facets of the global village. It is a vision that seeks to strategically resist the dominant economic system (including the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO) whilst still remaining engaged in the political and socio-cultural processes and institutions such as the UN and its various agencies.

Creating people-driven regional blocks such as the Southern African Development Community (of approximately 120 million people), and the East African Community (EAC, of approximately 96 million people) is the starting point of the Strategy of Resistance and Selective Disengagement (SRSD). Within these regional blocks there must be a free flow of people, goods and services. Externally, there must be a common tariff in relation to the rest of the world.

Presently the SADC, the EAC, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) are under threat through the combined pressure and manipulation of the EU and the US. Under current ACP-EU negotiations for what is called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), these regional efforts have been put aside, and instead the region is reconfigured along two totally meaningless “negotiating blocs” -- the “ESA” (which excludes Tanzania) and “SADC” (which excludes four of its original members). The US, for its part, has offered tariff-free access to its market under the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) to a selected number of African countries that abide by the conditions unilaterally set by it. Naturally, dissident Zimbabwe does not qualify. What we are witnessing is a re-enactment of the 1884 Berlin Conference when Africa was divided among imperial European nations. Now it is the turn of the US and the expanded Europe to carve up Africa according to their designs.

So the first step of the African nations in this region of almost 250 million people is to resist being re-divided by the imperial powers. This is, of course, easier said than done. There are many groups and individuals within the region who profit from Africa’s re-division and re-colonisation. However, they are in the minority, and with the mobilisation of the people (and with support from sympathetic organisations and NGOs in the North), this re-division of Africa can be stopped.

The second essential element of such a strategy is the adoption of a human rights approach to development. There is much discussion on the relative importance of political or civil rights, economic rights, and social and cultural rights, for example, whether democratic rights precede economic rights, or vice versa. This is a false and abstract debate. All rights must be viewed holistically, as *interdependent*. However, a human rights approach on its own will not be effective; there are powerful vested interests and a certain *power configuration* at national and global levels that abuse the ideology of human rights for their own ends. Besides, whilst a human rights approach is a useful starting point, important issues of *distribution* of welfare and economic well being within and between nations remain. It is important, furthermore, to take a *livelihood approach* to human rights, because human rights are not simply individual rights, but also community and national rights. An important ingredient of this is the *right to national self-determination*, enshrined in the UN Charter. Also important is the *right of communities* at the local level to determine their own life-styles and destinies, and control over the technology and norms of production and reproduction central to their livelihoods. A people-oriented strategy needs to address issues of concern to the people (such as land reform, food security, protection of biodiversity, and issues of sustaining livelihood) village by village.

A third essential element of an alternative strategy is the production *primarily for the domestic market* (defined, as above, in regional terms) and only secondarily for

export. An export-led strategy is seriously flawed. It distorts development priorities, diverts resources away from satisfying the needs of the population, creates wrong kinds of skills, and makes the economy precariously vulnerable to the hazards of international trade and capital movements. Furthermore, in the present global division of labour and production, Africa can compete neither with the advanced industrialised countries in the capital-intensive exports nor with China or India in the labour-intensive exports. Its best bet is to concentrate on developing and protecting the domestic market, at a level which functions optimally for the fulfilment of the region's needs. These are primarily food security based on regional food self-sufficiency, and industrialisation to satisfy the basic material needs of the entire population (and not just an elite) based on agro-mineral processing and indigenous technological development. Thus education must be linked with production, and with improving the technical and managerial as well as research and development skills of workers and those directly in control of matters of production and governance (as opposed to education for a bureaucratic and academic elite).

An essential element of this strategy is that the resources (land, forests, minerals, etc.) must be owned domestically through the public sector, and open to the private sector under public control/contracts/concessions. Furthermore, they must be managed by structures of participation such that the benefits (products, upward and downward linkages, knowledge) are shared with the communities living around these resources. The so-called informal sector must be integrated on the basis of rights and a redistribution of the wealth and opportunities (as opposed to the present system of misallocation of resources, with the informal sectors providing cheap inputs and a reservoir of semi-employed labour). And last, but not least, lessons must be learnt from the alternative self-help strategies people have developed (as described earlier), an essential component of which is that women own (and not just work on) means of production, especially land, seeds, water, and technology.

Conclusion

Early environmentalists (let's face it) have been overwhelmed by the marketeers. Even self-confessed "green" parties have turned into ideologists for liberalisation at the behest of their profit-seeking corporations and the IMF/WB. The neo-liberals have not only absorbed the environment within their paradigm, skilfully co-opting its concepts in their vocabulary, but they have also successfully sold the globalisation project as if it was good both for the South and the North, and good both for development as well as the environment. Nobody these days, for example, talks about the "ecological footprints."

However, the neo-liberal "developmental" impact on two-thirds of humanity and all the earth's surface and ecosystems has been catastrophic.

Africa is the global system's weakest chain, and best placed to lead alternative thinking. Here most governments are more or less under the control of the IMF, the World Bank, the donors and institutions controlled by the big powers. Most governments are aware of their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. But they are either too weak to take action, or they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. They are diffident and apprehensive of the consequences of challenging the system. They fear retaliation and sanctions.

On the other hand, the ordinary people in Africa are not only putting up resistance against the system but also trying out practical alternatives at community levels. At the global level, too, people are waking up to the inequities of globalisation. Civil society organisations have begun not only to challenge the hegemony of the mercantile ethos but also to take concrete steps (as in the WTO) to give support to governments in the South that otherwise feel too weak. This is one of the positive outcomes of the last decade of action against capital-led globalisation and the WTO.

African governments are caught between the rock and the hard place. On the one side is the pressure of the IMF, the WB and the donors; on the other, the people. On their own, governments will not break with the system. However, when pressed by the people and their allies among organised sections of civil society, governments take courage to challenge the system, as happened at Seattle and Cancun in the short history of the WTO. These still are early days. Some of the gains made by people will be lost under the power of corporate capital, and the military might of the US and the “coalition of the willing”. But as people gain experience in the struggle against the might of capital, and press democratic demands on their governments, the latter will learn how to resist and systematically and selectively disengage from capital-led globalisation, build regional blocs, create large domestic markets, and make production for local needs and using local resources (including indigenous knowledge systems) as the basis of alternative systems of production. This is not a dream; it is a realisable vision of the future.

It is a gradual unfolding process, like a curtain rising on the stage. The full potential of the movement that started with challenging the capital-led mercantilist globalisation has yet to be realised. But if some of the actions contemplated in this paper are put on the ground, they would embolden the forces of History that are moving towards a world that is fair and just to the bulk of humanity, and caring and nurturing towards the environment. What is required is the spirit of the will, and the audacity to challenge all reigning orthodoxies and institutions. This is no longer a mere dream. In 2004, the Southern African trade union movement officially declared an Alternative Strategy to Neo-Liberalism in Southern Africa. (See LEDRIZ 2004).

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