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**THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE STATE OF  
AFFAIRS OF AFRICA  
GENDER, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT**  
*The challenge of activism within growing fundamentalism-  
globalisation*

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## *ABSTRACT*

The presented paper intends to examine effectively the clear notion of Globalisation, its impact on democracy, governance, gender and economic development. It will widely demonstrate that globalisation reflects social relations that are not only forged at an economic and development level, but they are also presents in the political systems, social practices, cultural and environment spheres.

The paper will show that it is no longer nation states that are crucial to the economic growth, but increasingly economic power blocs and multinational corporations are assuming role. The paper also mainly addresses democracy within the context of globalisation. This is aimed at providing real meaning to the concept of democracy as opposed to the current trend of reducing it simply being a conduit to exercise franchise rights and constitutions writing events. The process should involve active and meaningful decision making process by individuals, families, communities, workplaces and ultimately, the relationship between drafting the individuals and the state.

Also to come under focal attention, will be attempts to establish the link between women oppressions and global trading. The key challenge will resolve around how we active empower people to determine their economic development, political systems, social and cultural relations within the context of global trading and its direct consequence at lower local level.

The scenario dictates that we device new approaches and strategies to propel gender activism to higher level. The activism that we advocates is "globalisation from below" this means that we need to craft our own unique strategies, not just to survive but also to use globalisation for positive social, culture and economic development. Communities will have to establish effective transitional webs to embrace and connect each other across the world. National solidarity is no longer enough, what is required is a global movement, which should use its muscle to protect and

shield the weak globally. We will argue that prospects of democracy being sustained as a system are poor if the values of capital continue drive globalisation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**“Our task is not to overthrow globalisation, but to capture it, and to use it as a vehicle for humanity’s first global democracy revolution” -George monbiot**

As the participants of this esteemed conference do we affirm or deny the declaration statement above? We can only carry out the spirit of the declaration provided we, as the citizens of the world, understand who we are, what we want and how we plan to attain our goals.

We continue to seek alternative solutions, fully conversant with the notion that no breakthrough is eminent to this vexed problem for the oppressed unless we organise ourselves as a formidable group. We need vast numbers to make this reality.

This conference is an opportunity for all of us to know and understand the world we live in so that we can propose better alternatives to the ones fostered and imposed on us, implicitly or expressly.

Let me from the Outset State that in writing this paper, one was cognisant of the fact that women are not a homogenous category, and while united as a gender, they are also divided by class, ethnicity, religion, age, ideology and sexual preferences.

Also, note that the discourse on the women question involves both men and women in all aspect of life.

This paper is not only about detailing helplessness on the part of women because this conference takes place against the backdrop of the commendable gains being registered such as the recognition of women rights as human rights.

Despite much progress, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has perpetuated inequality and environmental degradation (see various human development reports from 1996-1999 produced by the United Nations development program UNDP)

Just to illustrate the long and tortures road travelled by the women movement, in the early 1900s, only two hundreds international organisations worked for women rights.

One hundreds years later over eighteen thousands organisations are seized with this noble task- testimony to the global nature of the problem women face.

But lets take solace from the fact that a revolution in gender relations has begun and it is developing a global nature, differing only in degree and cultural context from country to country.

**Some sobering statistics:** *This is the world we live in-* one quarter of the world's population live in the extreme poverty of these 1.3 billions of people, about 70% are women. About 17% are in sub-Sahara Africa. The majority of these women are illiterate with no access to basic amenities like safe drinking water. Two - thirds of the 130 million children who are not in schools are girls.

Between 75% and 80% of the word 27 million refugees are women and children. Women hold 10.5% of the seats in the world parliaments. The majority of women earn an average of about three -fourths of the pay of males for the same work. Woman now heads one in every four household in the world. The primary victims of today armed conflicts are civilian women and children, with rape became more evident as the weapon of war.

It is estimated that 50% of the continent's 600 million people are likely to live in poverty by 2008. Two decades of the economic stagnation, cuts in public spending, debt servicing, civil wars, the AIDS epidemic and demographic pressures have seen educational outlays per pupil fall-one third since 1960. Two-thirds of women in Africa and half of men are illiterate.

Corrupt ruling elite's have played their part, even in countries were wars have not been an immediate issue. In Nigeria the former military leader General San Abacha and his colleagues siphoned US dollars 2.2 billions from their country coffers.

In the Congo Mabutu Sese seko tucked away US dollars 4 billion from the state's money while his people were starving. In the Ivory Coast, one long ruling president spent vast sums of money transforming his village with motor ways, hotels, a vast airport, and the World largest Christian church.

Africa's informal economy is ten times the size of the formal economy. No doubt if the assets possessed by the majority of people could be transformed into capital, there will be an automatic expansion of economic activity.

Africa's debt burden is one of the greatest hurdles impeding development. In Tanzania, since 1985, the debt have effectively transferred control of the country's economy to the World Bank and IMF. School enrolments fell by more than 60% when fees were introduced as an economic measure.

Before debt, Sub-Sahara Africa's per capital income rose 34% after 1980 it falls 23%. In the late 1990s the "drop the Debt campaign, organised by the jubilee 2000, focused World attention on the gap between rich and poor globally, and forced industrialised nation s to consider debt relief.

Uganda's US dollars 1 billion in debt relief enabled school enrolments to double. Mozambique converted 60% of its US dollars 127 million annual repayment into housing and health services.

Zambia where debt repayments threatened to engulf 55% of its annual budget of US dollars 8000 million, saved nearly US dollars 220 million from debt relief. These measures did not prevent Tanzania opting to purchase a US dollars 40 million air defence system from Britain. Nor did they convince multilateral institutions like the IMF, responsible for at least 40% of the debt of most African countries, to end their insistence on poverty-generating structural adjustment strategies as a pre condition for loans. And they did not prevent hedge-fund businesses continuing to profit from debt.

Today globally, some 27 million slaves exist, many of them forced to work as prostitutes labourers in rug factories or as farm hands picking coffee, cacao, cotton or sisal. In addition, some 250 million children work instead of attending school because they have no choice if they are to survive.

**This is the World we live-**The ten richest people on earth possessed in 2002 a combined wealth of US dollars 266 billion. This is five times the annual flow of aid from rich nations to poor ones, and roughly sufficient to pay for all the United Nations millennium health goals.

**This is the world we live in-**Hundreds largest multinational corporations now control about 25% of the global foreign assets. The sales of General Motors and Ford are greater than the GDP of the whole Sub-Sahara Africa, the assets of IBM, BP and General Electric outstrip the economic capabilities of the most small nations.

All the goods we buy or use, our petrol, the drugs our GPs prescribe, essentials like water, transport, health and education, even the new school computers and the crops growing in the field around our communities- are increasingly

controlled by corporations which may at the whim choose to nurture or straggle us.

**This is the World we live in-** Through the World trade organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, indebted countries have been coerced into opening their markets to foreign corporations and foreign produce.

Billions of dollars are being transferred all over in real time every hours of the day by institutional investors and mutual and pension funds. Corporations now a days are breaking up the chains of production and locating the links all over the World wherever seems most advantageous Designing their products in one place, entering into production alliances in another, outsourcing components and services activities somewhere else, sourcing their inputs, capital, raw materials and even labour from wherever costs of production are lower, tax benefits more favourable and access to raw materials or skills cheaper.

### **Where does it all begin?**

After WWII, the USA emerged from that war confident and economically rejuvenated. It embarked on a two-pronged strategy: state planning at home to redistribute wealth and foster political stability and international trade liberalisation to prevent nationalist economic competition. This period saw the setting up of AMF, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, now known as World Bank with the goals to stimulate and maintain demand through the provision of private credit. During the 1950s the bank focused largely on supplying capital to so-called Third World countries.

At the time, most of the countries in the developing world were still colonies. This meant that economic development was become the responsibility of the European masters.

The watershed came in the late 70s with the election of Thatcher and Reagan. The two leaders enthusiastically advocate free market policies and were hostile to the concept of an interventionist state. The mantra of free market as a panacea to the World's problem was soon disseminated globally with the aid of the IMF and the World Bank. The two institutions began promoting what was so called, the "Washington Consensus"- Which espoused fiscal austerity, privatisation, and market liberalisation.

Noam Chomsky argues that globalisation is the result of powerfully governments, especially that of the United States pushing trade deals and other accords down the throats of the World's people to make it easier for corporations and the wealth to dominate the economies of nations around the World.

Through the creation of the World Trade Organisation in the 1990s the World has seen this process unfold with much haste. There is no doubt that the political and economic crises that we have witnessed recently, from East Asia to Eastern Europe and Latin America is directly attributable to what Noam Chomsky argued above.

We are also witness to the decline and fragile quality of life of nations of Europe, Japan, and North America, which caused considerable turmoil. Tremendous upheaval is in the cards for coming years for economies of Africa.

### ***1.1 Impact of "globalisation on gender, democracy and development"***

What is globalization, why has it invoked such strong feelings amongst the citizens of the world? Writers and thinkers alike have defined globalization as implying the creation of new opportunities, risks, and benefits, and hence new sources of potential social function.

Globalization also refers to the new networks of production, finance and information, which have increased the international mobility of goods, services-delivery and capital. The globe is conceived as one market directed by profit motivations of private enterprises that know neither national boundaries nor local allegiance.

We know that structure change is an integral part of globalization, is a process of transformation and this process is largely shaped by exposure to international markets both in terms of production and consumption.

Since the world order is unequal, competition is necessarily unequal. And then the question should be how can developing countries like African countries meet the challenges of unequal competition? And how far can it absorb the shocks in its social economic system?

It is widely acknowledged that, the economic restructuring which has been taking place-characterized by deregulation, trade promotion and state cuts backs, and imposed on many African countries through IMF-designed structural adjustment programs have had the most devastating effects on poor women.

#### ***1.1.1 Gender dimension.***

We know that in most countries, women form the majority of the disadvantaged section in the society compared to men. Africa is no exception.

Whilst it is true that a section of African women—the elite and the upper middle class has gained the exposure to the global network. We have more women effectively engaged in business enterprises, free movement of goods and capital is helpful to this section. The globalization of trade and economy has definitely opened up economic and income opportunities for women, resulting in improved status in the household and an increase in position in the society as well as her self-esteem.

In Africa, women produce around 80% of the food and constitute more than half of small-scale farmers and provide about three-quarters of the workforce in food production and food processing. But women still lack access to land. Without secure land ownership rights they are unable to obtain credit and support production, but also they have no say in the trade agreements that are entered into by their countries and other nations. A fact for us to consider is that a cup of coffee in the rich world may cost dollars 3, but the farmer and his/her workers in Kenya who produced the coffee receives between two and three cents.

Most of African countries experience an acute shortage of gainful employment opportunities, million opt for migrant work in areas that make them more vulnerable to emotional, psychological, physical and sexual violence. Most African countries have been victims of structural adjustments programs which led to unemployment of a large number of men and women and increased frustrations, tensions and fear of job insecurity, with women made to pay the social cost.

With most African economies strained to the utmost under the challenge of globalization, it is unable to bear the burden of necessary health care and educational expenses. Women are denied the physical care they deserve, maternal mortality is extremely high, anemia is common and women die in large numbers from communicable disease, HIV/AIDS. The drop out rate among girls in schools is excessive. Sky rocketing food prices and export-oriented cropping patterns in agriculture contribute to women's declining access to food and nutrition. In Kenya for example, the number of women seeking help or advice on sexually transmitted diseases declining by 65% following introduction of fees for these services. In Ghana, the new fees forced two-thirds of rural families to stop sending their children to school.

Deregulation and privatization under the guise of free market restructuring, the privatization of public services had led not only to its reduced availability but also often to higher prices which has increased the risk of poverty amongst women. The cutting of government subsidies and social welfare provisions have hit the women the hardest making it more difficult to escape poverty. If we were to conduct a snap survey in most African countries that have privatized public

services, we will find that women as home makers have no balance the extra costs due to increasing charges for public utilities, education and health care as a results of cuts for public utilities.

Not only will their burden be intensified, there will also be mounting pressure to assume multiple roles for paid and unpaid labour. We have this Tanzania. Women take care of the elderly, the retrenched, taking on extra work in the informal sector.

The global assembly line is manned by women workers in free trade zones. Women perform subcontracted industrial home working at kitchen tables, as formal jobs fade permanently from the employment scene. The range and volume of the income-generating activities swelling the informal sector reflecting both the desperation and the entrepreneurial skills of women.

The overall “flexibilisation” and casualization of labour through which capitalism has managed to sustain its profitability depends upon the survival needs, the vulnerability and lack of choice, as well as the desire for economic autonomy and independence of poor women around the World-thus the growth of international sex trade

Worsening working conditions-women paid cheap and flexible labour force, no gender justice, and unlimited competition rules which will results in probable brain drain.

The breakdown of extended family is more clearly seen in the urban sector. With women finding employment and a newfound freedom, they are asking for tradition gender relation to change.

South Africa is a living example and proof of a country that has since 1994, pursued a policy of seeking close integration into the global economy. This has led to industries such as clothing and textiles-major employers of women -to state of semi-paralysis. As a result post-apartheid South Africa has seen rising unemployment with women in the majority.

The economic globalization in the form of, market democracy is creating the image of the new African woman. She is the professional woman, entrepreneur, and manageress, executive who is articulate, glamorous and assertive.

This is the image found in every woman’s magazine read avidly by middle class and aspiring working-class, who do not have the means to buy designer clothes. This picture is in sharp contrast with the women struggling to feed and provide shelter to her family because of unemployment brought about by retrenchment.

It is known fact that, the World Bank admits that some of its policies have been disastrous, and that it needs to change the way it works.

It then changes the names of its programs, rewrites its stated objectives, and continues to operate much as it did before. An example of this is its acceptance that many of the hydroelectric dams it sponsored, whose purpose was to relieve poverty and generate wealth, have forced thousands of people to leave their land.

### ***1.1.2 Democracy***

Democracy functions so far as individuals can participate meaningfully in the public arena. While running their own affairs, individually and collectively, without illegitimate interference by concentrations of power-it presupposes relative equality in access to resources-material, informational, and others, says Noam Chomsky.

One significant political development of globalization is the push towards democratization-heightened emphasis on good governance and respect of human rights. What we are seeing today is the west pushing for political reforms that it considers compatible with neo-liberal economic order-free politics and free markets.

The understanding of state activity is minimal in the global neo liberal vision. For a long time in our history, democracy was painted as a western gift to the world, carefully nurtured since its foundation in Classical Greece. R Robertson has argued that, democratization is not a western gift, it's a dynamic of globalization, to regard modernity, as Westernisation is to deny humanity its common heritage. G M Snooks once wrote in *the Ephemeral civilization: Exploding the Myth of social Evolution* that democracy did not originate in Classical Greece, he further stated "Whatever similarities exist between Greek forms of democracy and our own derive from a common reliance on commerce, commerce-based societies depends for their success on a wider ownership of resources and wider political franchises than conquest societies require: in other words they necessitate democratized political and economic system.

Globalization has not only transformed the governance of societies but also vastly altered the landscape in which all individuals existed, it enabled economic specialization and the formation of states, produced new social dynamic, environmental pressures, migration and continual quest for security and well-being. It accelerated population growth further, economic productivity enabled benefits to be transferred to workers in order to reduce the potential for disorder.

As these developments were taking place in the World, let's not forget that these changes had their impact on certain class of people. The agricultural crises drove the rural poor into cities, where they competed for work with an already abundant workforce. Unemployment, insecurity, poor conditions of employment and poverty created tensions that easily erupted into violence.

Can majority of African women in the continent safely identify with the following observation from developed countries?

- Better educational opportunities for their children
- Improved housing, hygiene, state health services
- Domestic and sexual violence no longer hidden
- Liberalized labour laws and cheaper transport

### *1.1.3 Is an alternative world is possible?*

I agree with bell hooks who wrote:

**Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, and the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that acts of speech, of talking back, that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject-the liberated voice. If women are to make significant inroads in the globalization debate, and movement then they must heed bell hook's advice.**

We are at a point in the world to openly acknowledge that globalization has helped millions of people attain higher standards of living: it has also benefited countries that took advantage of it by seeking new markets. But for millions others it has not worked. In the words of the former president of the USA, Bill Clinton, Ordinary people over the world are not sure about globalization of the economy. They are not sure they are going to benefit from trade. They want to see if there is a human face on the global economy, if can raise labour standards for ordinary people, if we can continue to improve the quality of life, including the quality of the environment. And if we believe-we, who say we believe in social justice and the market economy, really want to push it-we have to prove that the globalization of the economy can really work for real people. And it is huge challenge"

Many in particular women have actually been made worse off-felt increasingly powerless against forces beyond their control, seen their democracies undermined, their cultures eroded.

French president Jacques Chirac once said that it is precisely why people can not afford to be mere spectators of globalization. Democracy must tame it, accommodate it, humanize it, civilize it. How do we do that?

- “Think global-act local” and “act global-think local” the social relations that are linked at the economic level should also permeate the political, social, cultural and environmental spheres that permeate our daily lives, should make us think, feel and act both globally and locally.
- Protest as a catalyst for change: protest movement gives a voice to grass roots movements, NGOs campaigning corporations, and individuals by questioning, criticizing and publishing. Solidarity amongst women should continue-this will ensure that globalization of the economy promotes social rights, conflict prevention and economic social justice.
- Globalization from below: continue on this path and build on it, have more and more people at both global and local interconnected and interdependent in ways that humanity has not experienced before-where people are crafting their own strategies for survival and development.
- Through our civil society structures we must insist on effective governments, strong independent judiciaries, democratic accountable, open and transparent public and private sector. We should be the ones to define those democratic principles that best define who we are-lest we find ourselves in the same old position of adopting templates designed by and for countries that have no similarity or sameness with our own.
- Globalization should be about empowerment-the empowerment it engenders courses all universalism to be questioned and it creates a willingness to pursue alternatives. Let us praise empowerment, starting that there will be no miracles; no perfection, no millennium, and no apocalypse, in stead people need to cultivate skeptical faith and avoid dogma. People need to nurture benign rebels in their children, philosopher Jonathan Glover once suggested. If children were taught to think, if more philosophies entered classrooms as the subject for study, children might grow into adults less susceptible to demagogues. This empowerment must mean change in decision-making process, in policy-making, in the ownership of knowledge and control of information.
- Consumer activism should be encouraged but also should not be seen as a weapon only available to those with greater purchasing power, a form of protest that favors the middle class.

- Recognition that people participation in the social and political transformation means inclusion of women and men is a first in the process of change-change in gender power relations, change in management, use and ownership of resources.
- A comprehensive feminist analysis should continue to engage national governments and international institutional for a, after all, nation states enable globalization. Similar, it is nation-states that have carriage of the enactment of human rights treaties, through national legislative, judiciary and policy frameworks, it is therefore, gender and feminist activists that need to continue to look to ensure that women's rights are respected

## *1.2 Conclusion*

To all of us who express commitment to democracy, lets take a long, hard look in the mirror and ask ourselves in whose interests, and for what values, do we do our work. Let us believe that an alternative to the status quo is possible and attainable.

There is no doubt that there have been economic opportunities for women but also mounting threats. There is a need for development to focus on gender issues and work towards increasing the positive benefits of globalization for women as well as men. It is thus important for women movement to link up with other social movements and for the wider democratic social and political movement to seriously incorporate women's concerns.

Joseph Stiglitz once wrote that, the reasons for development is sustainable, equitable and democratic policies, development is not about helping a few people get rich or creating a handful of pointless protected industries that only benefit the country's elite, it is not about bringing Prada, Benetton, Ralph Lauren or Louis Vuitton for the urban rich and leaving the rural poor in their misery.

Development is about transforming societies, improving the lives of the poor and enabling them have access to health care and education. We need to direct our basic human desire into forms that can be achieved without war, and in co-operative ways. We also need to remember that our basic materials desire requires equally basic materials solutions. R Robertson wrote that human history, has demonstrated that of all the strategies experienced by peoples, democratization has the greatest chance of success and means more than just the right to vote and hold opinions independent of church and state. It means as post-war strategists have argued, economic democratization, the deepening of markets, and individual and community empowerment.

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