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South African Women in Dialogue Forum

Financing for Gender Equality

Keynote Address – 29 September 2008

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Development economist Albert Hirschman wrote a book entitled *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* nearly forty years ago that provides an unusual and insightful perspective on the interface between personal integrity and the public interest in times of governance failure or conflict. There is a dilemma here that many of us have engaged with, one way or another, in the course of South Africa's political evolution, and perhaps particularly in the past few weeks. In challenging times there is an unavoidable tension between the politics of exit and the exercise of voice, and we should not be surprised that the demands of loyalty are felt differently by people who view events through different windows.

Our struggle for freedom has of course been shaped, in no small measure, by a long history of interplay between an organisation in exile and resistance within, and by the different ways in which democratic goals could be, and had

to be, advanced, internally and abroad. This is such a rich history, by no means fully told yet, but we already have wonderful written records on which to draw – from those whose lives were committed to political and armed resistance, and also of so many diverse personal experiences, such as Noni Jabavu describes in *The Ochre People*, or Chabani Manganyi explores in his biography of Es'kia Mphahlele, aptly titled *Exiles and Homecomings*.

There is a tension that runs through the women's movement and women's empowerment strategies, I would venture to suggest, that also involves difficult choices between exit and voice. There are certainly issues that require special initiatives, separate programmes, focused on women's needs. But there are also a wide range of women's concerns that are unavoidably bound up with broader social and economic development priorities and programmes. In this broader empowerment challenge, the mobilisation of voice is more likely to succeed than the logic of exit and separation. And so there is a tension between loyalty to the specific cause of women's advancement and commitment to the more encompassing objectives of human development and social progress.

To say that there is a tension here is not to say that there is a contradiction. It is to point rather to the constructive possibilities associated with shared, and often mutually reinforcing objectives and development strategies.

Some of these joint interests are now well understood, and indeed have contributed positively to our policy development and the way we have implemented various social programmes.

We know that income support for poor households is more likely to be spent on meeting basic household needs if it is controlled by women. And so it turns out that the expansion of the child support grant, which mainly goes to mothers or women as caregivers, and has been the fastest growing part of our social security system, has been a highly effective and well-targeted poverty reduction programme, focused also on our Constitutional obligation to give priority to meeting the needs of children.

We know that the education of women has strong further intergenerational human development benefits – in both the educational attainment of their children and in health, nutrition and family welfare. So there is a positive link between our achievement of gender equality in schooling and these broader development goals.

However, an unfortunate trend in many developing countries is the marginalisation of programmes aimed at women's development during periods of economic decline. What has happened in quite a few countries, such as Indonesia, is that the focus given to gender equality programmes tends to decrease during economic downturns, as attention turns to broader growth concerns.

There is an interesting line of research in labour market dynamics that points to productivity gains and improvements in workplace safety associated with gender diversity in employment. We know how important the role of women officers is for effective reporting, investigation and management of crimes involving women and children. So the gender dimension of our employment equity policy framework brings broader benefits.

We know that improved health and sanitation, and better care of children, depend on reducing the burden on poor women associated with inadequate water, housing and transport services.

In the work that is currently in progress on social security reform, we have come to recognise the importance of longer life expectancy of women as a key consideration in the design of retirement funding arrangements. Here is a good example of the disadvantage of trying to deal with women's needs separately. Funded and priced separately, and informed by appropriate actuarial considerations, an annuity purchased at the age of 65 yields a considerably lower income for a woman in retirement than for a man. Our social security reform project offers the opportunity to construct a shared basic retirement savings arrangement in which annuitisation is priced at a

common rate for the community as a whole, for men and for women. Retirement savings is an area of policy in which the particular needs of women need to be properly analysed and articulated, but it turns out that separate funding arrangements are unlikely to be the most appropriate way of meeting these needs.

In these and many other areas of public policy, we know so much more about what needs to be done, today, in South Africa, because of work undertaken under the auspices of the Women's Budget Initiative, supported by the Gender and Economic Policy Group of Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Finance and several other organisations and research agencies. Its three published books and numerous reports and papers have covered an extraordinarily wide range of public policy, institutions and programmes. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have put such time and effort into this work, and who continue to do so.

There is rightly a focus on budgets and financing in this work, because that is the nexus through which resources are allocated, and indeed that is the focus, again, of this Forum.

But I hope it is clear from the few examples that I have cited, that behind the financing arrangements are much more important social and economic linkages, and a better understanding of these linkages is usually the critical analytical and research challenge.

And so I would like to suggest that in your proceedings during this Forum your focus on budgets and resources should not be limited to those spending programmes that are expressly and explicitly identifiable as "women's" allocations. There are of course some directly attributable women's focus areas – some categories of health and welfare service or education programmes lend themselves to specific gender-based analysis, and there are various development initiatives, targeted services and research projects that are narrowly aimed at supporting women's empowerment.

But one of the central lessons of the Women's Budget Initiative, in all its strands of research taken together, is that women's issues cannot be carved out and separately analysed, for budget purposes, for planning purposes, or for monitoring and reporting purposes, from the broader social and development challenges we face. We are in this development project together, women, men, children, the elderly, the young, the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

I think that for some of those involved in this work, it has perhaps been a source of disappointment that the treasury does not yet have a women's budget division, and our publications do not include an annual women's budget report, or children's report, or disability report.

But it would clearly be wrong to create separate exits and entrances, separate budgeting processes and allocations, for activities and services that are inextricably bound up with the whole of our social and economic development agenda.

It is far better to focus on strengthening voice and accountability, within the mainstream of the budget process, and in each and every area of public planning and service delivery in which there are either special needs or shared concerns that should be brought into consideration.

This is of course not just relevant to the South African context, but it is central to the project of advancing women's rights in development globally. In six weeks time, we will have the privilege of hosting the 11th International Forum of the Association for Women's Rights in Development in Cape Town, and there will be an opportunity to share experiences from across the world in strengthening the voice of women and ensuring that the rights, capabilities and potentialities of women are fully reflected in social and economic development programmes.

Your forum, and the programme of dialogue planned for the week ahead, provides a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made in

South Africa since 1994, and the challenges that still lie ahead, that might be shared with international delegates at the November International Forum. In achieving broad equality of access to education, South Africa is well ahead of many peer group countries. I believe that our approach to social assistance grants as a primary source of income support to poor families provides excellent examples of the social benefits associated with income transfers to women as beneficiaries and caregivers. I know that in the work of many South African community organisations and non-governmental organisations there are many illustrations of the power of women activists at the forefront of social change and broad-based development. I know that South African women in business can bring encouragement to those in other countries who face entrenched barriers of access, whether in the credit market for small enterprises or in executive and board-level decision-making.

But I am equally conscious of the enormity of the challenges we still face. We know from South African experience that there are strong and persistent gender dimensions to vulnerability in old age or disability, the risk of unemployment and the associated threat of chronic household poverty. These are also global realities, and they will also be on the agenda of the International Forum in November. We have a responsibility to keep the spotlight firmly focused on the role of women in poverty reduction, not least because of the severity of South Africa's HIV and Aids pandemic, the extent of South Africa's experience of violence against women and our need to respond to the needs of child-headed households.

It is equally important for us to take a hard look our performance as a country in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. I want to draw your attention to the MDG 5a which calls on the world to "reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio" between 1990 and 2015. In 1998 our maternal mortality ratio was 150 per 100 000 deaths. In 2003 it was 166 per 100 000 deaths, and in 2004 it was 185 per 100 000 deaths. The worrying feature is that the indicator is moving in the wrong direction. Interestingly South Africa is not alone and it appears to be a factor in many developing countries. However, our spending in health care provision has increased substantially

over this period. It would be important to not only look at the allocations we have made but also on the outcomes and quality of spending in health care. And to ask the tough question about whether we are getting value for money.

These are daunting challenges, and we have to appreciate that our goal, our vision, for a society that is just and fair, in which men and women share equally in work, family care and the fruits of rising prosperity, is still a distant target. Much still needs to be done.

But in the end, we will surprise even ourselves at the progress we will make, if we speak with a clear voice, and if that voice is informed by an honest dialogue of the engaged and committed.

Or as Noni Jabavu put it in her preface to the 1982 edition of *The Ochre People* and reflecting on the difficulties of the 1950s and the 1970s: “Speaking for myself, I would have been numbed in 1955; would have fainted; and in 1976 and 1980 I would have been paralysed. Yet nothing daunts you. My aunt (Mam’omkhulu Makiwane) declared thirty years ago that your counterparts were indestructible, uncrushable. Looking back over our history, it seems she spoke the truth; for you of today are proving that our nationhood is indestructible then is now, and ever will be. To a writer of my generation, young South Africa is an inspiration – no less. I hope that in reading this book which one of your ‘grandmothers’ wrote long ago and far away, you will see how vastly you have progressed and brought us forward from the views we beheld when we were your age in those times long gone. We were scarcely peering, even dimly: whereas you see things clearly now...”