

ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION: PROSPECTS FOR POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT. The post-apartheid South African economy is now responding, as elsewhere in Africa, to the fiscal/monetary exigencies of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) as stipulated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). A cardinal principle of SAPs is the reduction of expenditure on public education and other areas of social development. With that financial reality in place now, this paper examines women's education and related issues in the new South Africa. The basic proposition in this regard is that with SAPs now applying a downward pressure on educational expansion and affordability, women's education in general, and black women's in particular, will suffer in the long-run.

RÉSUMÉ. Comme celle d'autres pays d'Afrique, l'économie de l'Afrique du Sud se conforme depuis l'abolition de l'apartheid aux exigences fiscales et monétaires des programmes d'ajustement structurel (PAS) de la Banque mondiale et du Fonds monétaire international (FMI). L'un des principes fondamentaux sur lesquels reposent les PAS est la réduction des dépenses consacrées à l'enseignement public et à d'autres programmes de développement social. À la lumière de ces nouvelles réalités financières, l'auteur analyse la question de l'éducation des femmes et certains problèmes qui s'y rattachent dans la nouvelle Afrique du Sud. Il soutient à cet égard que les PAS réduisent l'accès à l'éducation et nuisent à son développement et qu'avec le temps, ce sont les femmes et surtout les femmes noires qui en souffriront.

The emancipation of women is not the task of women alone, but that of men and women alike.

The late Oliver Tambo, former Secretary-General of the African National Congress (cited in Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995:89).

Human development is development of all people. No society can progress half-liberated and half-chained. Human development, if not fully engendered, is fatally endangered.

Mahbub ul Haq, Principal author of the United Nations' *Human Development Report*, 1995.

Any discussion of women's education in South Africa presupposes, primarily because of the political and socio-economic objectives and results of these learning systems, a limited focus, at least, on the recent history as well as the current and potential future characteristics of the overall pedagogical situation. In that general temper and those contextual specificities, therefore, it will be observationally and analytically important to understand and explain both education's policy objectives and social outcomes under the prevailing socio-economic and political systems of one given epoch or another. In this essay, while the main focus is discussing and analyzing the potential impact of economic liberalization, i.e., Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), on women and women's education, I will also briefly, but relatively deeply, look at the history of education in preracial democracy South Africa.

The introduction of historical events as well as explaining current social systems under the policy and economic paradigms of South Africa's recent or distant past may not conform to the prevailing trends that could, at times, seem to be overwhelmingly focusing on the future. As important as that is in post-apartheid South Africa, though, it is still my understanding that *thinking in time*, i.e., using historical events and relationships to make prudent political and economic decisions, would still be a wise approach in relation to both the current situation as well as future essentialities and expectations.

The main proposition in this project is that with SAPs now being applied in almost all the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa (O'Meara, 1997), the long-term reduction on social expenditure will negatively impact on the overall educational attainment of South African women in general, and black South African women in particular. In the case of black women, this could still be so, despite the current Reconstruction and Development Program (hereafter RDP) (African National Congress, hereafter ANC, 1994) objectives of earmarking hundreds of millions of dollars over time to improve the educational situation of South Africa's disenfranchised blacks. And while the overall RDP objectives of direct redistribution by, for example, earmarking 2.5 billion rands for five years, as President Mandela has vowed, may be helpful in the long run, the needs will still, many times, outweigh the prescribed allocations (see Murray, 1993; Murphy, 1992).

Eventually then, and with SAPs applying a downward pressure on education, the prospects for post-apartheid effective and adequate systems of learning for women may not be that promising. That will be

complemented by the apparent economic reality where the South African government may not be able to go beyond the approximately 20 percent of the national budget it now spends on education (Bundy, 1950).

Before I specifically look at the general situation of women and women's education, though, I prefer to present succinctly some historical notes on South African education. The main objective of relaying this short historical presentation is to create a plausible analytical link between the contents as well as the character of colonial and apartheid education and the potential educational and development difficulties that are being experienced by women, especially those women who have been the most marginalized under these systems.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Keto (1990) asserts that precolonial traditional African societies in Southern Africa have evolved their indigenous systems of learning. These systems of learning, although informal, were, nevertheless, conducive to the processes of socialization and other social arrangements that were in place. Antithetical to Keto's argument is the position of Pells (1970) who claims that prior to the arrival of Europeans, Africans in South Africa were devoid of any systems of learning. It was, therefore, Pells (1970) continues, the burden of the European to educate the African, primarily for the efficient exploitation of the latter's human and natural resources.

It was not a coincidence, therefore, that with the arrival of the Dutch settlers in 1652 and beyond, education in South Africa became an instrument of subordination fulfilling Pells' twentieth century proposition with precise recording. Education in the post-settler era was designed and implemented for the cultural and psychological domination of the native population. Consequently, education served as a prerequisite for the myriad of schemes of marginalization that have befallen on the colonized groups. Kallaway (1984) describes this paramount colonial phenomenon:

The peoples. . . of South Africa were not simply conquered in a military sense; did not only lose their political independence; were not simply divorced from an independent [and self-sustaining] economic base; were not just drawn into new systems of social and economic life as urban dwellers and wage labourers, [but were also dominated with heavy doses of massive ideological transformation of

which the education system was one of the most important, if not the most important, major agent]. pp. 2-3

With the overall South African philosophy of education essentially responding to that situation, the socio-political system of the compulsory separation of races known as apartheid was legally implemented in 1948. With apartheid came the new segregationist concept of "own education" formulated in the Bantu Education Act of 1953 which was implemented in 1955 (Bundy, 1994). Both philosophically and technically, Bantu Education was an overwhelmingly racist policy that simply perpetuated the permanency of more powerful systems of cultural and economic deprivation negatively impacting on the lives of the perennially disenfranchised African population. The architect of Bantu Education, H.F. Verwoerd, former Minister of Native Affairs and later Prime Minister justified the situation this way:

What is the value of teaching the native child mathematics when he can not use it in practice [i.e. when he will not be trained for high paying professional jobs, see Macrae, 1994]? . . . If the native inside South Africa today in any of the schools in existence is being taught to expect that he will have his adult life under a policy of equal rights [vis-a-vis the European], he is making a big mistake. (cited in Suzman, 1993:36).

The separate systems of education for South Africans of different backgrounds were not conducive to the even development of all. Logically, that should not have been unexpected especially when one examines some essential quantitative and, therefore, qualitative components of education. In this specific case, these include per capita expenditure per pupil, teacher-pupil ratio for blacks and whites, and the outcomes of these in terms of matriculation and skills acquired for social and economic development.

In these basic aspects of education as of mid-1980s, for example, the per capita expenditure was 7:1 in favour of white children; the teacher-pupil ratio was 41:1 for blacks versus 19:1 for whites (Wilson & Ramphele, 1989). For African children, one stark result was the extremely disappointing situation of pupil progress where for every 100 black students entering grade one in 1969, only **four** have finished matriculation in 1978, while 69 percent of white children successfully did so (Wilson & Ramphele, 1989). In terms of the long-term consequences of these disparities, there are 4,467 tertiary education students for every 100,000 whites, and only 665 for an equal number of blacks (Herbst, 1994).

With black students coming into the post-apartheid education system so greatly handicapped, SAPs, by eventually reducing social expenditure, could actually thwart the educational attainment and, therefore, the developmental aspirations of these students. In terms of the situation of women who have lower levels of education and, therefore, higher illiteracy rates than their male counterparts (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995), the overall impact will be hardly conducive to reducing the gap, let alone closing it. Beyond the illiteracy situation, the number of women in higher levels of secondary education and in tertiary education is again proportionally very low (Unterhalter, 1990). Before I go further into this central question, though, and for conceptual and policy clarifications, I would like to delineate some of the salient characteristics and objectives of SAPs. That relatively short observation will be followed by a discussion of the potential "problematics" of the interaction between post-apartheid education and women's development on the one hand, and between the latter and SAPs on the other.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMS: ESSENCE AND ARGUMENTS

Economic liberalization or neo-liberal economics is dominated by the view that supply creates its own demand. Stated otherwise, when the government does not intervene, the market will balance itself, tending toward equilibrium and full employment (Brooks, 1989). The terms themselves collectively describe the type of development reform policies propounded by the United States government and affiliated prominent International Financial Institutions (IFIs). These policies, commonly known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), should contain, as they are presented by the Bretton Woods institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF): fiscal discipline, overhauled public expenditure, tax reform, financial liberalization, exchange rates responding to IMF priorities, systemic privatization of major government institutions, direct foreign investment, deregulation, and property rights (Williamson, 1993).

To the adherents of the neo-liberal paradigm, SAPs and everything that comes with them are not just representing the economic ideology of certain institutions or countries, they simply make good sense in development issues. SAPs, therefore, should be adopted universally (Williamson, 1993). Evidence from Africa, though, shows that the application of SAPs has not been successful. If anything, SAPs seem to have proven that they are not capable of remedying Africa's economic or other institutional (e.g., "democracy") woes (Bienefeld, 1995;

Cheru, 1995; Ihonvbere, 1995; Sinha, 1995; Saunders, 1995; Plank, 1993; Bowen, 1992; Schmitz & Hutchful, 1992).

In discussing what he terms as “the reckless behaviour” of IFIs, Bienefeld (1995) points out how even experience does not override the “sacred” neo-liberal ideology of SAPs:

The disastrous impact of neo-liberal policies in Eastern Europe is a graphic reminder of the centrifugal forces unleashed by their reckless adoption (or imposition) under inappropriate conditions. And Africa bears the scars of the same errors of judgment because the IFIs used the leverage conferred on them by the debt crisis to spread these high risk policies in the impoverished continent. (p. 52)

Schmitz and Hutchful (1992) also see economic liberalization as essentially reducing Africa’s chances of a better tomorrow. They see globalization as “posing a greater danger of a systemic breakdown in the socio-economic fabric of Africa. . . . This will be mainly due to the loss of sovereignty over economic policies by African states to IFIs” (p. 13). With the verdict on SAPs economic and government policies in the general African scene this harsh, what could be their impact on women and women’s education in South Africa? Before we deal with this question, though, let us first look at the World Bank’s policy on education.

Perhaps the least productive aspect of the World Bank’s educational policy is its unwavering adherence to the prominence of human capital theory in education and development (Jones, 1992). The underlying premise of this theory is that human skill and knowledge, when fully maximized, will lead to the transformation of societies. And as Jones (1992) again points out, that may be the case in economies that are expanding but not necessarily in shrinking or even slowing economies. The South African economy is indeed a good example, for it has been expanding in the 1950s and 1960s, slowing in the 1970s, declining in the 1980s, and not recovering that much in the 1990s (Bundy, 1994; Murray, 1993).

In the World Bank’s 1994 Annual Report, the emphasis is, for example, on post-secondary training rather than tertiary education. That apparently does not take into account that education is not only definable in sets and subsets of economic calculations, but as Jones (1992) notes, education also implicates, emphasizes, and allocates social values, roles, and responsibilities. Moreover, the Bank is seemingly producing a “cluster” of statements on education that are more than once contradic-

tory. These policy points relate to such issues as promoting privatization, diversification of funding sources, linking funding to performance, while at the same time proposing an increase in equity and accessibility in higher learning. Whatever the Bank's real aims in this regard are, a closer examination of the situation may reveal that the Bank's education policies, especially in higher education, will produce the adverse effects of accessibility and equity in developing countries such as South Africa.

WOMEN IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

To create a developmentally accountable and more equitable socio-economic terrain for all South Africans while at the same time fulfilling its economic liberalization obligations, the government, in its 1995/96 budget, attempted to achieve two important aims: keeping, at least to some extent, its RDP promise, while at the same time "keeping the business community happy." In echoing the latter objective, the South African Chamber of Business praised former Finance Minister Chris Liebenberg, himself a former banker, "for designing a budget that balances the needs of the RDP and the imperative of ongoing fiscal restructuring" (*Africa Recovery*, June, 1995:23). In this budget at least, therefore, the RDP which is not a likely bedfellow of SAPs, has somewhat benefited. An 11 percent defense cut was used to increase spending on health, education and housing, with education getting the highest sum of 21 percent of total spending (*Africa Recovery*, June, 1995).

While women who constitute 54 percent of the South African population, but form 39.4 percent of the country's workforce (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995) could directly or indirectly benefit from the limited increase in social spending, the remedies as they are prescribed now could only scratch the surface of a cluster of underdevelopment ailments that affect the lives of South African women. The essence of underdevelopment in this case is not limited to educational and economic issues. There are also other basic issues that directly impact upon the lives of women, and that have been relatively neglected. A telling point in this regard, for example, is that it was only in 1993 that the South African government, while primarily responding to international pressures, signed a number of United Nations (UN) conventions on Women. Among these were the *Convention of Political Rights for Women* and the *Convention for the Elimination of All Discrimination against Women*. In addition, the government has created three draft bills: the Promotion of Equal Opportunities; the Prevention of Domestic Violence; and the Abolition of Discrimination against Women (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995).

At the grassroots level, Women's National Coalition (WNC) was formed in 1992 from seventy organizations of all religions and races. And as Sadie and Van Aardt (1995) point out, WNC's importance for South African women is conveyed in:

1. Women collectively aspiring for, and demanding their rights.
2. The coalition representing an enduring symbol for women who are now represented by an organization whose primary objectives are empowering all South African women.

The existence and temporal evolution of such an organization is also warranted by an overall disadvantaged socio-economic situation of women vis-a-vis men. As indicated earlier, women as a group in South Africa are less educated than men; they are also less likely to be employed, and even when employed, they are overrepresented in what is termed as "pink-collar" jobs, i.e., nurses, therapists, social workers, hairdressers, and teachers (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995).

Moreover, and while there are more women in South Africa than men, women, for example, hold only 1.3 percent of corporate positions in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange's 657 companies (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995). Apparently, the situation of women in post-apartheid South Africa requires special affirmative programs that should redress not only apartheid's segregation policies, but also gender-based inequities that could hinder the potential of a majority of the country's population. And education is, beyond doubt, the primary candidate for improving the condition of women now and into the future.

BLACK WOMEN AND SAPS

Although they form the majority of South African women, black women have also another less enviable distinction. They are the most marginalized group in all of South Africa (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995). This is directly related to the legacy of apartheid where with their male counterparts, black women were relegated to the scrap-heap of economic development and socio-political emancipation. And because of that, there are marked differences between white women and black women, with the former, while numerically about one-fourth of the latter, still constitutes 20.4 percent of all economically active women. Moreover, among all women, white women are overrepresented in managerial, executive, and administrative occupations (almost 78 percent of all women in these categories), while 83 percent of women in service occupations are African (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995). As low

wage earners, the next highest concentration of black women workers is in the agriculture sector (Barrett et al., 1985).

Women, therefore, were not, and are not a homogeneous group in South Africa. Their lives and futures are coloured by conspicuously marked trends of primarily race-induced class distinctions. As such, South Africa was both a wealthy First World country and a poor Third World "nation" (Robertson & Robertson, 1977). It is practically, because of this reality, that black women have more in common, at least in development terms, with other African women than with their white compatriots in South Africa. In that sense, African women in South Africa are victims of what is termed as "double deprivation" (*Africa Recovery*, December, 1995). That is to say that while overall human development was low for black South Africans, black women's situation was worse than black men's. This is apparently an African version of what, in other contexts, Carty (1993) and Mohanty (1992) call *multi-layered marginalization*.

Even with the graduated effects of SAPs on education in RDP-South Africa, black women, as women elsewhere in Africa, may still have more problems to deal with than any other group in the country. The double burden that SAPs place on poor African women is that while these women have little to cushion them against its overall impact, they still have to take on more work. This is so because African women, who are primarily responsible for making family ends meet (*Africa Recovery*, December, 1995), have to compensate for any income shortfalls in their household.

BLACK WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND SAPS

With black women finding themselves at the bottom of a steep hierarchy of race, class, and gender differences in the new South Africa, it is clear that their most potent weapon to challenge the slippery slopes of development is quality education which is affordable. The hurdles these women may have to jump over, though, or sometimes fall over, are numerous and cumbersome. This will be so even with the unhindered application of the education component of the RDP.

This assertion is supported by the fact that even within the less than encouraging situation of women's education in South Africa, black women are many "knots" behind others. In one occupation (artisans, apprentices, and related occupations), for example, where women's overall share is 5.1 percent, African women's share is a dismal 0.2

percent (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995). This reality, while representing one aspect of women's venture into hitherto uncharted occupational territory, could also serve as a distinguishing marker for the task that is awaiting South Africa in implementing tangible programs for black women's education and development.

That task will again be complicated by another fact that is also common in almost all the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. While women have to engage in wage earning activities to supplement the family's income in a high unemployment global economy, they also have to do unpaid domestic and other family work that is estimated at \$11 trillion (*Africa Recovery*, December, 1995). This massive amount of money goes unrecorded in the global economy. What it conspicuously does, though, is that it reduces women's physical capacity to develop their potential. It also reduces their leisure time and unpressured decision-making moments for personal evaluation and choice implementation. Moreover, the burden of this unpaid work almost nullifies women's chances of balancing their individual and group aspirations in how much and what resources they spend on what tasks as well as analyzing any tangible returns from a given activity.

As the combination of job demands – mostly triggered by fiscal restructuring and incessant house work – reduce the possibility of women acquiring the education they need to “jump-start” their development, the implications will not be limited to women alone. The perception that the mother's education as well as the values she places on schooling being important environmental factors in influencing scholars' success or failure are to be considered. It was Jawaharlal Nehru, India's post-independence Prime Minister who said that “it is more important, if there can be any comparison, for the women of a nation to be educated than its men” (cited in Ghosh, 1986:25).

For black South African women, the educational situation at all levels seems to demand nothing short of an emergency that goes way beyond the overall allocations of the RDP. With the majority of these women in rural or semi-rural areas, they are the least educated and, therefore, “helplessly dependent” on men for their livelihood. To improve their situation and that of their families then, these rural women could, for example, receive and make use of capacity-building projects and other specialized training initiatives that could increase their ability to become self-supporting. These types of programs differ from other “aid” projects in that they have the potential of economic sustainability for many years and even for decades. Stated otherwise, projects of this

nature do not solve the problem for a day or a season; they, instead, equip people with the basic skills to effect positive, permanent changes in their lives.

A project of this nature that I am personally familiar with and intellectually contributed to its formation was implemented in civil war-torn Somalia in 1994 by the African Society for Humanitarian Aid and Development. It is an African Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), supported with help from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and Partnership Africa-Canada (PAC). The particular program created four capacity-building centres where women are receiving literacy programs, basic health education including pregnancy and maternity information, sewing lessons and sewing machines, and basic typing and administrative skills. This program is now many times more productive and more enduring than many other, more expensive projects. And suffice it to say that many women who participated in this project are now capable of transferring their skills to others who, in turn, could do the same for many years to come. All of this does not mean, of course, that the majority of black South African should be in the same socio-economic "circle" with displaced women in stateless Somalia, but starting from somewhere, acquiring the necessary skills and confidence, and progressing slowly but steadily could be pragmatically useful and culturally desirable.

In the case of higher education achievement, and while the overall number of women holding post-matric degrees is very low, the case is again discouragingly dismal for black women. In this case, of all post-matric degrees or certificates held by South Africans, white women have 14 percent, Indian women have four percent, coloured women have two percent, and African women have one percent (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995).

CONCLUSION

Finally, in assessing the situation of all South African women in general, and black women in particular, we conclude that the overall impact of SAPs could hardly be conducive to elevating women's education. What these could produce, at least in the long-run, is to increase the gap of education between those who can "hop" on the bandwagon of the global economy and those who are desperately trying to cling to it.

As the speed of the neo-liberal economy train increases, though, the educational impact will be more negative for South African women

than men, and among women, it will be black women who find themselves more marginalized by SAPs than any other group in the country. And at the end of the day, the case may not resemble anything that borders on the empowering situation women so vigorously should demand. Hence, there is the real possibility of South African women again lacking the long-awaited economic and social empowerment that would have enabled them "to have a real choice in what they want to do, and in establishing a society that affirms and values that choice" (Sadie & Van Aardt, 1995 p. 89).

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