

Chapter 1

Marketisation of governance

“The transition to democracy is a narrative of the exclusion of women. What is needed is a new geography to give women space. This new space which women seek is one where there is negotiation between those with power and those without.”¹

Introduction

Political Restructuring and Social Transformation (PRST) was adopted as DAWN’s focus for research in 1996. DAWN’s ongoing work on alternative development frameworks² and the global political economy pointed to the multiple impacts of the changing economic order on the state and its capacity to govern. We began our regional and global research and analysis on PRST after intense and rigorous debates leading up to and after the World Conference on Women in Beijing and the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen. We noted the trends after the collapse of the eastern bloc: the changed political landscape, the rise in various forms of fundamentalism, the discrediting of state-led development and the ascendancy of neo liberal economics.³ Our engagements with women at the global and national levels revealed the contradictions and fractures within the global institutions and the ways in which these affected our countries and regions.

Claiming our footprints

We were challenged to examine how we engaged within the United Nations and other global systems of governance. Moreover we began to reflect



on the gains achieved through the UN conferences and the extent to which these gains made a difference to the lives of poor women.

Our analysis on these and other related issues pointed to the gains that had been achieved through engagement and strategic advocacy. Especially gains that were made through women's movements at Beijing and at Copenhagen on the location of women's rights as human rights and the international guarantees according to which we could hold our governments accountable. DAWN's analysis showed that these gains were being lost because they were not being translated into real change at the local level. Attempts to review how national processes of political restructuring and social transformation were taking place and the extent to which national governments, regional and global institutions of governance were responding to the commitments made to advance women's equality were essential (the ten commitments are reflected in Box 1). How can these gains, these paper guarantees, be translated into real change, a change at the level of social relations?

Among the ground-breaking agreements made by the world's leaders in the Declaration are ten commitments to:*

- *eradicate absolute poverty by a target date to be set by each country;*
- *support full employment as a basic policy goal;*
- *promote social integration based on the enhancement and protection of all human rights;*
- *achieve equality and equity between women and men;*
- *accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries;*
- *ensure that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals;*
- *increase resources allocated to social development;*
- *create "an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable people to achieve social development";*
- *attain universal and equitable access to education and primary health care; and*
- *strengthen cooperation for social development through the UN.*

*Source: World Summit for Social Development,
The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action,
6–12 March 1995, United Nations.*



The path we had travelled “had no road maps and few markers to guide us”⁴ as we began to deepen our analysis on the links between regional, national and global processes of governance and how these shaped the lived experiences of poor women from the South. We were mindful of the “dual nature of our engagement”. We had to locate ourselves as a relevant force in the different forums and spaces at global, regional and national levels, and at the same time, maintain a critical distance to ensure that in using global space our struggle for gender justice did not become weakened.

So we began to interrogate our approach and our own strategic objectives within DAWN. Were we really looking at how to engage within a global space that expanded the framework for the attainment of rights of those people who were previously excluded? To what extent were we legitimating existing inequalities and power relations by engaging with global institutions of governance? Would engagement lead to change from within or would it perpetuate the status quo and marginalisation of women, particularly poor women? These questions informed our decision to ground our research and analysis within regions of the South to better analyse how global governance, and especially agreements made in the boardrooms of the World Trade Organisation, affected the legitimacy of the nation state.

Contested terrain

DAWN realised that it would be straddling a difficult path; that of entering contested space (within some global institutions) to ensure that feminist perspectives on democracy, citizenship, nationality, the nature of the state, global governance, globalisation, and gender justice were heard and considered in these forums. While new spaces were opening up for critical engagement we had to ensure also that our engagement did not diffuse our objectives as a feminist network from the South or lead to co-option.

We asked ourselves whether changes at the global level actually resulted in fundamental social transformation at the level where it counts, in terms of social relations, in terms of relations between men and women, rich and poor and in terms of relations at other levels of society?



The research process

As a feminist network of the South we engaged in the research process to strengthen our capacity to engage at national, regional and global levels by recasting the analytical frameworks that influence political restructuring. In doing this DAWN sought also to constantly reflect on and review through a collective process the experiences of feminists from the south as articulated by them.

The research process brought together the perspectives of women researchers, activists, and feminists from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Island states, South and South East Asia in a process of critical debate and collective analysis. In our research and analysis we sought to reframe the debates on governance and politics from a feminist perspective and to articulate a vision of genuine political restructuring to achieve social transformation.

Framing the discourse on governance

We realised that we had to interrogate both the mainstream discourse on governance as well as the underlying reasons for the way in which this discourse is constructed and promoted. In doing this we hoped to expose the contradictions and the flawed assumptions in a system that is eroding the state's capacity to deliver social needs. DAWN debated the emerging framework that was used to guide research and analysis within regions and through interregional processes. During the process we began to challenge mainstream governance and political reform ideas that are antagonistic to human development.

In order to change the discourse on governance we examined both state and non-state processes – so that through our analysis we would present a view of governance and of political and social transformation that would be different from the mainstream or malestream debates. Mainstream debates on these aspects are male-dominated and conventional in their approach and thinking and serve to reinforce women's sub-ordination in structures of power.

The evolving framework

Across the development decades links have been made between the need for social development and growth. Indeed, economic development has



also been seen by some theorists to have the potential to increase social mobilisation and the demand for political participation. The tendency to fast track Western-style political liberalism on the back of economic liberalism remains a persistent feature.

The type of transitions that many countries are experiencing raise issues of concern that go beyond whether political restructuring should precede economic reform and development. These issues relate to whether national states are able to create an enabling political environment to promote human rights as well as the participation of women and the institutionalisation of gender in ways that would result in equity and social justice.

Against this backdrop, this period of globalisation has given rise to certain dilemmas that states and civil society organisations are grappling with. The first is the growth dilemma. There is a need for economic growth but an inability to live with the consequences of the exploitation and dependency created through national and international market forces in promoting growth that is jobless and unsustainable.

Secondly there is the control dilemma. We need to guide technological innovation but we shun centralised control. On the one hand, there is recognition that certain fundamental changes such as the redistribution of power and resources will not occur because of the divisions within our society. At the same time the control and regulation of social and economic resources is becoming more and more centralised through global networks, institutions and mechanisms. The sovereignty of nations is being affected. There is no adequate or appropriate value system and philosophy within the market system for the redistribution of resources or wealth to those who are in need.

Finally we are confronted by the work role dilemma. Our societies are increasingly unable to supply an adequate number of meaningful work roles for people. The division of labour within the household and society also has an impact on production and reproduction.

These dilemmas are part of the crisis that confronts us. In order to promote social development in this context we have to adopt strategies



that can challenge the structures, systems and processes that reinforce under-development and poverty. This requires a rigorous programme of policy and institutional change. Policy and institutional changes need to be considered at the level of national governments and at the level of international governance.

The democratic imperative

Our discussions pointed to the need for an understanding of governance within a global context that predetermines international relations alongside the increasing interdependence of national economies. We analysed the importance and significance of various types of states—from plural democracies to authoritarian systems. The need for democratic renewal and social transformation was a common concern in the process. Feminists asserted the importance of developing a participatory democracy that would promote the possibility of full social citizenship and integration for the excluded.

We also began to reframe traditional constructs such as states, issues of sovereignty, of political identity, of security through feminist lenses. We asked ourselves what these terms mean and how they emerge in everyday processes of decision-making. Moreover we realised that our shared experiences in the shifting, contested terrain of governance and political power had certain commonalities. Does this shifting terrain with diverse actors actually lead to us changing our strategic objectives? Or do we use that terrain to consolidate what we want to achieve? How do we mobilise different forms of power on multiple fronts to expand the space for and attainment of gender justice? Feminists from the South examined both state and non-state processes that shape political and social processes in the arena of governance. Chapter two of this book responds to some of these questions and provides a critical analysis of the state, politics and state power and how these constructs result in different realities and institutional formations.

Our ongoing analysis reconfirmed our view that countries in the South are experiencing recurrent crises that have their roots in both historical



factors as well as contemporary crises of governance that call into question the legitimacy of the state. The impact of these crises challenge us to examine the political and economic compacts of power that are being made both in the north and south through international institutions and governance mechanisms at global, regional and national levels. There are multiple and varied impacts on women. For these and other reasons it was necessary to examine the objectives of states in relation to women and what the notion and practice of citizenship means in the context of the persistent denial of rights to women.

The efficiency imperative

The global political economy, the continuance of neo liberal macro economic policies and the rise of fundamentalism and other forms of patriarchal backlash which emerge in the context of “identity politics” also made us question the rhetoric of good governance and political restructuring. Global governance and efficient management have become the new mantras of international agencies and institutions at the same time as the power of states and the capacity of states to govern is being reorganised and redirected away from public interests to secure conditions for private interests.

Chapter three provides a rigorous analysis of the impact of this phase of globalisation on the state and on women. An overriding feature of our analysis on the state and international economic governance is the marketisation of state functions. This is not only with regard to the selling off of state assets but also with core policy and legislative functions being outsourced or contracted out to private, usually foreign, consultants. In the context of this marketisation of governance what does democracy and participation mean for those who have and are outside the centres of power.

The market needs the protection of the state to promote its economic policies. The flip side is that quasi-state organisations such as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF are providing a “one policy” fit for countries in the South. This includes the privatisation of essential services and utilities. Together with increasing levels of poverty and jobless growth, essen-



tial services are outside the reach of the poorest citizens. The burden of care is pushing those on the margins into the most degrading and hazardous forms of survival. This inevitably leads to further fragmentation and deepening conflict. The international debate on governance has been reduced to what kind of government is needed for the global market. The emphasis is on efficiency and engagement with the market forces in a competitive environment. Government's attention has been diverted from providing for its citizens to how to secure foreign investment and markets. In the ensuing race to open markets and promote free trade countries in the south lag far behind.

These dynamics prompted DAWN to seek political alternatives that would reverse the marginalisation of women. In chapter four feminists interrogate the relationship between state and non-state processes. This is done against the backdrop of gender equity and the extent to which governments and the full range of institutions in society have incorporated the objectives of social transformation and gender justice into policies and practices. The marginalisation, deepening poverty and different forms of violence experienced by women in the south reinforced the need for political alternatives in chapter 4. Despite some shifts post the UN conferences, the pervasive nature of colonialism, patriarchy, ethnocism, racism, sexism, fundamentalism and narrow nationalism continue to have a devastating impact on poor women. These factors are mediated through both government and transnational corporations in culturally determined ways.

The crisis of distribution

The extent to which mainstream debates on governance have co-opted the language of transformation is arguable. Indeed, a disturbing trend is the homogenisation of the concept of good governance without a critique of the impact it has on the lives of women. In this way dominant forces project an image of uniformity and common purpose when this is not the case. Central to our evolving debates was the concern with how governments, political and economic elites capture state power to retain the status quo



and their own vested interests. We began to examine the political and social spheres as a shifting terrain within which the many competing claims to various forms of power and resources create compacts and trade-offs that result in further fragmentation and patterns of exclusion. Given the sites of contestation and women's location within them it was also important to analyse the type of social and cultural relations that are outcomes of the political economy and the inequalities that women experience at both personal and social levels.

We challenged the thinking that political changes underway within national and regional contexts could lead to social transformation that would shift the balance of power and forces in favour of women and those who have been excluded from society. Women's experiences and discourse revealed that transformation and human development is not necessarily an objective of the state. Chapter five provides an analysis of the feminist movement, social movements and the state. Key issues related to the distribution of power, resources and the ongoing dilemma of working with and outside of the state are raised.

Throughout our research we linked the process of political restructuring, not only to a deeper understanding of the nature of the state and its instruments, but also to the need for the transformation of relations and processes within and between governments, business and civil society organisations. We tried to make sense of our societies, and the post-modern context, in which the dynamic changes take place at an unsurpassed rate. This made us question orthodox modes of analysis that no longer provide us with useful analytical tools to make sense of what is happening as we leapfrog into the 21st Century.

DAWN's commitment to seek alternatives that serve the interests of those who have been excluded both economically and politically, particularly women was strengthened during this project. Implicit in the conceptual framework on political restructuring is our recognition that economic and political processes are inter-related and that economic power and political power are mutually reinforcing. Further more, while the sites of struggle



and actors may differ, the compacts, negotiations and confrontations that take place at various historical moments contribute to women's multiple experiences of gender oppression at the house hold, community, regional, national and international levels.

Conclusion

The experiences and analysis of feminists in the South confirmed our views that global economic institutions, informed by neo-liberal policies, have unleashed multiple forces and processes in the social, economic and political spheres that have far reaching implications for women.⁵ In the chapters that follow the narrative of the marginalisation and exclusion of women is played out in unabated violence, increased militarisation of states, more fragmentation than ever before, persistent poverty and growing inequalities. Even as we are told that the international system is determined to address these aspects at the United Nations review of the World Summit on Social Development, women's experiences reveal the gaps between the rhetoric and reality.

Notes

- 1 Aminata Diaw, 1999, in her presentation at the DAWN Africa PRST Research meeting in Cape Town.
- 2 Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives written by Gita Sen and Caren Grown clearly voiced the concerns and views of poor women. Challenging the Given – prepared for the WSSD and Markers on the Way: the DAWN Debates on Alternative Development, by Gita Sen highlighted the complexities of the global political economy and the need to review institutions of global governance.
- 3 Claire Slatter, 1999. Signposts to the Summit: Towards WSSD+5
- 4 Gita Sen, 1995:4 Markers on the Way
- 5 Mukerjee, 1998

