Globalisation, Equity and Development: Some Reflections on the African Experience*

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Introduction

The last decade and half has witnessed an intense and continuing debate focused mainly on the direction, structures and impact of the on-going process of globalisation. This debate, touching on all aspects of the process - historical, economic, technological, political, social and cultural - has thrown up a range of questions, many of which remain unanswered or have been answered unsatisfactorily. Just about the only point on which there is the semblance of a broad agreement is the empirical fact that the last fifteen years in world history have been characterised, overall, by a generalised acceleration of the process of globalisation – especially, though not exclusively, in the area of trans-border economic transactions and the speed with which this happens - and that among the key factors accounting for this acceleration is the revolution which has taken place in information and communication technology. The compression of time and space which many have pointed to as constituting a defining feature of the accelerated pace of globalisation has been critical to the changes in economic organisation and practices that have been observed. However, beyond this, questions have abounded as to whether the (current) process of globalisation - if at all we can even talk about in these terms - is, in fact, as new as is assumed in some quarters and there is no agreement as to what the actual impact and promise of the process as constituted are for individuals, groups, firms, countries, and the international system itself. Matters are not helped by the fact that beyond the direct impact which it has had, the process of globalisation has also thrown-up a host of contradictions of its own which have fed into existing difficulties to pose new, more complex challenges.(Griffin and Khan, 19991;Roach, 1996; UNRISD, 1995; Martin, 1999)

Among the most hotly contested issues in the debate on globalisation is its development impact, including the ways in which it has affected crucial developmental indicators such as equity within and among the countries that constitute the international system. The viewpoints which have been expressed on this question are as varied and as diverse as there are contributors to the debate on globalisation; these viewpoints will be closely considered in this essay. What is important at this point is to note that the uneven and differentiated impact of globalisation on the economies and polities of the world accounts, in large, measure for the differing responses it has elicited. Both the uneven and differentiated impact of the process speak to the fact that individuals, groups, firms and countries have encountered globalisation with a differing range and mix of advantages and disadvantages, as well as from the stand point of the different historical experiences that they carry. This is a point which I will attempt to build upon in this reflective essay which will also seek to situate the specific African experience in the broad context of Africa's previous encounters with the world. Furthermore, it will be suggested that the basic conceptual underpinnings of the on-going process of globalisation and the structures that have been erected or which have emerged to manage its different aspects are directly implicated in the inequitable outcomes that have been observed so far, as well as the unbalanced and limited developmental impact which has been noted.

Developmental Paradoxes of Globalisation

The empirical evidence which has been marshalled to demonstrate the emergence of a new phase of globalisation points to a massive movement of resources, especially capital, across national boundaries on a scale and with a speed never before experienced in world history. At the same time, the revolution in information and communication technology has furthered enhanced the capacity of firms to act internationally. And yet, in spite of these giant strides, the statistics also suggest that the rate of impoverishment is growing on a global scale and the numbers of the poor and the excluded are rising in some regions of the world. (UNCTAD, 1997, 2001, 2002; UNRISD, 1995) More than this, the rate of upward mass social mobility locally and globally appears to be decelerating in spite of spectacular cases of individuals acquiring millionaire or billionaire status. In some regions of the world, the on-going process of globalisation has been associated with the collapse of the middle class, side by side with the widening of the social gulf between the rich – whose ranks have been radically thinned out – and the poor whose numbers are swelling by the day (Aina, 1989, 1996). Internal social differentiation has intensified as much within groups with a formal income as among those without an income. Statistics indicating the enormous generation and movement of wealth are matched by those pointing to emergence, growth and spread of poverty and impoverishment on a gargantuan scale. Not surprisingly, at the same time as promises of globalisation are being celebrated, especially on such issues as the homogenisation of tastes and consumption, the world has probably never known a more extensive process of social exclusion while the gulf between the rich and the poor is widening in all countries, and the segmentation of the mass of the poor appears to have intensified.

All over the world, there has been a generalised retrenchment of social policy, with the poorest countries going the furthest as they grapple with the twin task of economic crisis management and structural adjustment (UNRISD, 1995; UNCTAD,2002). The decline in social expenditure has taken its toll on popular access to educational and health services; the introduction of various cost recovery/sharing measures have further reduced the capacity of a significant proportion of the world's population to reap the benefits of modern medicine, education and other social services. Studies from various parts of the world have established the fact that over the last two decades, there has been a steady rolling back of some of the gains in the field of citizen health, education, literacy levels, access to potable water, and overall life expectancy recorded in the post-1945 period. Clearly then, there is a disconnection between the idea of globalisation as encapsulating and conferring a sense of cumulative, incremental progress for humankind or presaging the dawn of a new era of global citizens or cosmopolitan patriots and the realities of social exclusion that constitute the lived experience in most parts of the world. From a sociological point of view, it is possible to speak about this pattern of globalisation as amounting to a globalisation for a tiny minority and thus to raise questions about its sustainability from a variety of perspectives, including a developmental one.

The centrality of cross-border financial flows to the entire process of globalisation is probably one of its key distinguishing features – indeed, it is also often cited as evidence of the process. The mix of the flows that are taking place and the strong short-term, speculative logic underpinning them would seem, in part at least, to account for the paradoxical situation in which increasingly, investment flows do not translate into growth and an enhancement of the prospects for long-term development. As governments adopt or are compelled to adopt policies designed to liberalise trade and capital accounts, vulnerabilities, especially in the developing world, to shocks arising from speculative capital flows have increased; but more than this, the capacity in many countries to master the domestic economic terrain has been eroded at the same time as the basic goal of policy –making has been lost. All around the world in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, various international organisations drew attention to the phenomenon of "jobless growth", the situation whereby in spite of the respectable growth rates posted in many countries and regions, employment generation seemed to be perennially elusive and job loss was on the rise as governments and firms implemented various "rationalisation" and "down-sizing" measures. Historically, "hot money" such as was increasingly moved across boundaries from the 1980s onwards as speculators sought stock markets and other outlets from which the highest and quickest return could be made, has never, on its own, delivered development (Ghai, 1992; Gore and Figueiredo, 1995; UNRISD, 1995). Africa's experience has been made worse by the fact that, as a region, its share of the international financial flows taking place is very significant, a reality which has been deployed both as additional evidence of the continent's failure to pull in the benefits of globalisation and an argument for the continent to pursue sustained open economy policies that will convince investors to bring in their resources.

In spite of the destabilising effects of the unfettered flow of short-term speculative capital across the world as evidenced by the East Asian crisis of 1997/1998 and the meltdown experienced in parts of Latin America, and in spite of the limited developmental return of these flows, policy continued during the 1990s to be geared towards promoting the kind of stock market capitalism designed precisely to attract speculative investors. It was the clearest evidence, if any were needed, that the current process of globalisation is one which is overwhelmingly dominated by finance capital (Polanyi, 2000). Questions have been raised as to the implications of a globalisation project dominated not just by finance capital but highly mobile speculative investors given to a herd-like mentality for development both on a global scale and in specific local contexts, including the weaker economies of the international system. The subordination of productive capital to the logic and requirements of finance capital has had implications for the flow of capital for long-term productive investments, the sectoral/sub-sectoral distribution of the foreign direct investment flows that are taking place, and the relative stability of the accumulation process. In some regions of the world, the last two decades, overlapping with the acceleration of the process of globalisation, have witnessed a process of de-industrialisation as local and global productive structures collapse even as the service sector and the "bubble" economy enjoy a boom. Where investments have occurred beyond the short-term, these have gone into the development of service economies built on an "off-shore" logic or the mining of precious minerals operated on an enclave basis, including in zones of conflict which guarantee speedy return on investments made and promise a rapid turn around period.

Looking at the specific African experience, it is both ironic and paradoxical that the intensification of broad economic liberalisation on the assumption that the opening up of economies will enable the continent reap the benefits of globalisation has had almost exactly the opposite effect. For instance, in spite of widespread market reforms designed to attract foreign investments for kick-starting African economies, the continent's share of global foreign direct investment flows have, in fact, undergone a decline. Worse still, the flight of capital from the continent has never been more intense while dependence on foreign aid and foreign technical advisers has never been higher and the external debt burden heavier. The global policy discourses of the 1980s and 1990s on Africa adequately capture this paradox: attention was focused on Africa in terms only of remedial measures such as safety nets, high-indebted poor country initiatives, and poverty reduction strategies. None of these remedial measures, in and of themselves, promise development or are even capable of constituting the basis for the developmental process (Vivian, 1995; Aina, 1996; UNCTAD, 2002). When all of these are taken together with the fact that Africa is the one region of the world that has experienced the worst social performance over the last two decades, it might be possible to understand why in the same period as the swansong of globalisation and its benefits grew louder in the leading Western countries, Africa was experiencing what some commentators are now referring as the lost decades of development (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999; Mkandawire, 2001).

African Encounters with Globalisation

The suggestion that the last two decades in Africa are lost developmental decades runs directly in the face of the promise which the most enthusiastic academic and policy advocates of globalisation expected that the process will confer on individuals, groups, countries and the world. The dominant international discourse of the period from the mid-1980s onwards considered globalisation virtually as a *dues ex machina* that was both omnipresent and omnipotent, the only challenge which was left was the articulation at all levels of governance of strategies and policy measures for maximising the benefits that flow or are expected to flow from it. As evidence itself of the tremendous progress which humankind has recorded, globalisation, according to this perspective, promised a whole new world of opportunities that would add up to carry development to new heights. This discourse, influential as it was, set the parameters for much of the early debate on globalisation in Africa. The policy challenge which was at first defined consisted of how to ensure that Africa was positioned to reap the potential and actual benefits of globalisation. The international financial institutions which were already dominant in the African policy process played the leading role in this and for them, the only way Africa could participate more fully and effectively in the global mainstream, and in so doing reap the benefits of that participation, is to extend and deepen the market liberalisation project that was at the heart of the structural adjustment programmes that they were already busily administering with broad-ranging support from other donors. In time, the discussion was summarised by the notion of Africa's "marginalisation" in the unfolding process of globalisation as evidenced, among others, by the continent's falling share of world trade and investments. The challenge was to halt and reverse the "marginalisation" of the continent through the adoption of the neo-liberal economic policies integral to structural adjustment and which, in the reading of the World Bank, had served other developing regions of the world such as East Asia very well (World Bank, 1993; 1994).

The notion of Africa's marginalisation from the international system is one which was employed by different interests to serve different purposes. For the international financial institutions, it was basically deployed as one more argument in support of the core policies at the heart of the structural adjustment programmes they were promoting; for African governments, it was a useful argument in support of the case for greater development assistance; while for some business groups, it provided the platform for pressurising government to adopt policies that are favourable to their interests. But it is a notion which has also been robustly challenged by scholars such as Amin (2001) and Bangura (2002). At one level, it has been argued that the notion of the uniform, blanket marginalisation of Africa from the global mainstream is neither empirically correct nor conceptually helpful. A review of the different facets of Africa's connections with the rest of the world would indicate a simultaneous process of high articulation in some instances and low articulation in others. The key challenge that is posed is how to ensure that the areas of low articulation are minimised so that the continent can embark on the path of sustainable development (Bangura, 2002). At another level, the very suggestion that Africa is marginalised is completely contested with the argument that of all the regions of the world, Africa is the one continent that is in fact most open to international trade and investment as evidenced, for example, by its import-dependence and balance of payments records. Seen from this point of view, the issue at stake when the continent's failure to reap the benefits of globalisation is considered is not because of its marginalisation since, in fact, it is not marginalised at all, but the problematic manner of its integration into the international economic system (Amin, 2001).

Amin's argument about Africa's problematic insertion into the international economic system as being at the root of the continent's development crises has stimulated discussions about the wider African historical experience with the processes of globalisation. Particular attention has been paid to those aspects and the period that bear on Africa's position in the modern international system. In this connection, discussions on two earlier phases of globalisation and their impact on Africa have been revived. The first of these, centring on the processes that led to the onset of the transatlantic slave trade, resulted in a major depopulation of Africa and a spiral of conflicts and instability linked to slave raiding that undermined the development of the continent. As Walter Rodney put it in his seminal study, the slave trade was the first step in the underdevelopment of the African continent (Rodney, 1980). The experience of the slave trade era also set the context for the insertion of Africa into the modern international economic system as a dependent partner responding primarily to external dynamics. The theme of dependency was extended further and deepened in the second modern phase of globalisation which, in the African experience, centred on processes that led to the onset and consolidation of imperialism, colonial rule and the extant international division of labour under which African countries play the role of suppliers of raw materials for the accumulation process in the West. In this context, the flow of direct foreign investments which grew in significance during this phase, the rise of the modern multinational corporation that was associated with it and advances made in transport technology – including containerisation in international shipping – simply fed into and reinforced the dynamic of domination and dependence that was the hallmark of the African encounter with this phase of globalisation.

Without the structural foundations and dependent status of African economies changing and with the basic impulses of the economies still being geared to responding to external needs as opposed to the domestic, autonomous requirements for sustained accumulation and balanced development, there can be basis to expect that the latest stage of globalisation will radically alter the fortunes of African countries for the better. Rather, what seems to be occurring, in the context of the global restructuring that is taking place, is the danger of the consignment of some regions, including, though not exclusively African, to the status of a fourth world (Amin, 2001). The restructuring of the international division of labour associated with the process of globalisation, the

If the structural foundations of African economies have to be overhauled in order for the continent to stand a chance of developing itself, the adjustment policies that were pursued in the 1980s and 1990s under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have, in the view of African critics drawn from different disciplines, not been helpful at all. Initially introduced to help contain the crises in African economies, the adjustment measures, in practice, became part and parcel of the dynamic of decline on the continent, reinforcing some of the existing difficulties and creating new complications (Olukoshi, 1993; Mkandawire and Olukoshi, 1995; Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). The reasons for this are not too far-fetched: in theory and in practice, structural adjustment comprised a set of deflationary austerity measures which were by definition ill-suited to the challenges posed by the African economic situation and thus further complicated the problems. What is more, the policies of interest, exchange rate, and price liberalisation that, together with public enterprise privatisation/commercialisation/liquidation and trade liberalisation that was at the heart of the adjustment process were applied as a package uniformly to all African countries irrespective of the individual nature and severity of their economic problems. Matters were not helped by the single-minded anti-state ideology and practice of structural adjustment; indeed, the policy of market liberalisation was undertaken as though it was completely incompatible with a role for the state in the development process. State retrenchment became the flip side of market liberalisation across Africa as the neo-liberal approach to economic crisis management gained ascendancy on the continent. Furthermore, the freeze on wages that was imposed, together with the drastic reduction in public expenditures which particularly affected the social sectors, and the introduction of cost recovery/sharing measures took a heavy toll that was only belatedly acknowledged.

In the view of leading critics of the African experience with structural adjustment, the last two decades have been characterised by a maladjustment of the economies on account of the deflationary policies that were at the core of the programmes. If African economies failed to respond to incentives, it is not for the traditional reasons that have been advanced by the authors and/or intellectual advocates of the framework, namely, the lack of consistent commitment by African governments, the alleged stop-go-stop approach to adjustment adopted by governments, the deep-seated problem of governance, the absence of a "sound" policy macro-economic policy process, the absence of an effective external agency of restraint, the inconsistent application of conditionality on account of donor geo-strategic and political calculations, etc. Rather, it is because the market reform policies themselves have severely maladjusted African economies, leading, among others, to economic stagnation, cases of social and economic regression, de-industrialisation, high levels of unemployment, the acceleration of the flight of capital, inflationary pressures, and poor investments, in addition to the failure of the region's economies to respond to instruments and incentives that seem to work well in other contexts. In this sense, the structural adjustment years represented a major diversion from development and it could not have been otherwise given the strong deflationary thrust of the framework and the fact that it became the very essence and a permanent feature of all policy-making.

The dominance of the theme of structural adjustment in the African policy process over the last two decades set context within which the continent was required to grapple with the challenges of globalisation. It was a context which was not propitious for adequately meeting the developmental and equity issues thrown up by the accelerated processes of globalisation. For one, as seen in critical intellectual circles, the African experience with structural adjustment was hardly one which increased the prospects of the development of the continent; if any thing, the adjustment policies simply became part and parcel of the dynamic of crisis and decline that they were ostensibly designed to help tackle, in addition to generating new problems of their own on account of their inappropriateness for resolving the developmental challenges facing the continent. For another, the policy capacity for fully rising up to the challenges in terms of opportunities and difficulties posed by globalisation had been severely eroded in part at least by the market reform project driven by the international financial institutions and donors. With the economic crises in most countries already setting the stage for this decline, structural adjustment simply accelerated the process. Matters were not helped in this regard by the single-minded anti-statist approach that informed the implementation of structural adjustment. This approach translated into the conscious retrenchment of the state in every sense as part of the effort to cut it down to size and put in place a minimalist apparatus whose mandate would consist of creating the "enabling" environment for the market to flourish. Today, various studies have indicated that Africa has the lowest per capita ratio of civil servants for any continent, a factor which no doubt has contributed to the sapping of policy capacity. Furthermore, the massive brain drain which the continent has experienced over the last two decades and which continues to sap the continent of qualified personnel has deepened the crisis of policy capacity facing the continent.

With the state hobbled and reduced to a shadow of itself, its reach and legitimacy, never fully established in the first place and now further undermined during the adjustment years, its policy making capacity, even at the technocratic level, weakened, its ability to generate consensus around policy destabilised by the fact of the erosion of the domestic policy building process and context by the donor regime of conditionality, Africa was hardly equipped to rise to the challenges of globalisation. The weakened state which is the legacy of two decades of structural adjustment in Africa is probably the most legacy of the market reform project of the Bretton Woods institutions insofar as the African capacity to meet the challenges of globalisation is concerned; it was a disadvantage which overwhelmingly belonged to the continent as compared to other regions of the world. And yet, ironically, in spite of the glaring capacity gaps faced by the continent, the discourse on globalisation, in the way in which it was packaged into the African policy and broader intellectual milieu, remained essentially a neo-liberal discourse. That is why for many, there is a logical, organic connection between structural adjustment and globalisation (Amin, 1992; Aina, 1996) . Whether it be in terms of what influential donors suggest that Africa must do in order to partake fully and benefit from globalisation, or in terms of the specific market liberalisation approach that appears to underpin the economic globalisation project, echoes of structural adjustment ring loudly in African ears in a context in which, with the state so severely drained, the capacity even to master the market for a public, developmental purpose is weak. It is also the reason why globalisation gas been perceived by the critics of structural adjustment as the continuation, within an international framework, of the narrow notion of the market and the reform agenda built on it that dominated the African policy making process all through the 1980s and 1990s and into the new millennium. Indeed, globalisation, in the way in which it is being driven and governed by the dominant international powers, and as manifested in the workings particularly of the World Trade Organisations (WTO), has come to be perceived as a mechanism for locking in structural adjustment policies into the policy processes of developing countries (South Centre, 1998).

The concern that globalisation has become an instrument in the hands of the powerful to lock-in the advantages conferred on them by an international project of economic/market liberalisation has persisted in spite of the delay clauses built into the effective date of application to developing of the various tariff dismantling and trade and financial liberalisation agreements introduced over the last decade. It remains the case in spite of the promise of the movement within the WTO towards a developmental round that will take on board and address the developmental concerns of the developing countries. Similarly, the United Nations' efforts to focus attention on the challenges of financing development did not assuage the feelings that the globalisation process, as constituted and managed, is skewed in favour of powerful corporations, financiers and states. Not even the ideas about the introduction of a Tobin tax to offer developing countries a possibility for generating development finance from the flow of short-term capital, ideas which failed to make an impression on the leading beneficiaries from the flows, were able to overcome the growing pessimism about the lop-sided nature of the globalisation process. Given the adverse developmental consequences of structural adjustment and the organic interconnection between the policies that were central to the adjustment experience and those that have underpinned the process of globalisation, the question that was posed centred on the prospect that globalisation, in an unreconstructed form, would simply mean a continued diversion of the attention of African countries away from the task of development. This seemed to be a strong possibility given the absence of workable trade and industrial policies that would enable the countries of the continent to promote domestic capital accumulation and lay the foundations for economic competitiveness. Such trade and industrial policies as are necessary for the development of African countries would, at the domestic level, not only require a tempering, to say the least, of the rapid and unbridled policies of liberalisation being promoted under the auspices of the WTO and with the assistance of the IMF and the World Bank, in the view of scholars like Mkandawire, they would require nothing short of the re-birth of a developmental state on the continent (Mkandawire, 1995, 2001).

Internationally, the kinds of trade and industrial policies that would be favourable to African countries will require an investment of effort into the restructuring of the international economic system, including the global financial architecture which came under focus in the aftermath of the East Asian crisis of 1997/1998 but which was soon relegated to the background as the worst consequences of that crisis on the international financial crisis were successfully contained. Questions connected to the global commodities regime, including the pricing of commodity exports from Africa and the terms of trade of the continent, will also need to be addressed as part of an integrated, holistic attempt at providing a more conducive international environment for the development of African countries to occur. Furthermore, the debilitating consequences of the heavy external debt burden of African countries will need to be redressed if the continent is to have a reasonable prospect of turning the table of underdevelopment. It bears underscoring the point here that the measures which are called for in tackling the African external debt crisis go well beyond the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative which African countries have been offered but which is as cumbersome and replete with conditionality as it is limited in the actual relief it offers and scope it affords for the pursuit of heterodox macro-economic policies. Philosophically, the trade and industrial policies that could serve as a framework for the promotion of development in Africa will necessarily have to depart radically from the persistent dichotomisation of the policy discourse on the continent between the state and the market conceptualised as rival forms. This conceptualisation was central to the design and implementation of the entire structural adjustment framework; it has been carried over into the formulation of the discussion on globalisation and the ways Africa can maximise its benefits from the process. As Mkandawire (2001) has observed, such a discourse, if it is not jettisoned, can only hinder the creative management of the continent's development.

Some Equity Issues in the Globalisation Debate

Much of the critical discussion in Africa on globalisation has mostly focused on the problems of development which it poses for the continent. This is understandable given that growth and development enhance the probability of the sustainable realisation of redistribution and equity. This is, however, not to say that attention has not been paid to the equity dimension of the process of globalisation. Here, once again, the starting point for many of those who have contributed to the debate is the structural adjustment experience of the 1980S and 1990s. As noted earlier, the adjustment process both fed into existing structures of inequality in African countries and created new structures of inequality of its own. The statistical evidence accumulated through various case and longitudinal studies suggested a swelling of the ranks of the working poor in Africa, the thinning out of the middle class, the widening of the gulf between the rich and the poor, and a generalised process of social recomposition in which decay seemed to outweigh renewal. The widespread informalisation of African economies which was accelerated in the period from the early 1980s onwards in the framework of an intensified process of migration from the rural to the urban areas and an explosion in the population of urban centres, was indicative more of a deepening crisis of livelihood than a creative response to a season of decline. For, not only did the expansion of the multiple livelihood strategies of individuals and groups which fuelled the process of informalisation not involve the emergence of new sites of accumulation, the majority of the players in the informal sector were engaged in small-scale activities that provided them only with the means for a truly precarious subsistence. Buyers were few, their buying power very low, and too many people were involved in selling the same commodities or providing the same services. Furthermore, in spite of the intense segmentation in the sector, opportunities for upward mobility were few and far between. That is why, even in those cases where there was success among some of the informal sector operators in tapping opportunities for accumulation, these tended more to function as isolated enclaves (Gibbon, 1995; UNRISD, 1995; Aina, 1989, 1996; UNCTAD, 1997).

There was no bigger visible symbol of the problems of equity that have bedevilled Africa in the period since the 1980s than the widespread unemployment that became an open sore in most countries. True, African countries never really managed to achieve full employment in the first two decades of independence but those years were generally years of expansion in employment opportunities. The period from the early 1980s onwards witnessed a severe contraction in employment opportunities as economies either stagnated or regressed and structural adjustment took its toll on industry and agriculture. The real sectors of African economies, which traditionally are crucial to job creation, suffered some of the worst consequences of the structural adjustment process. Both in the public and in the private sectors, the loss of employment by workers and the paucity of new opportunities for employment creation were shared features of the economy. As it pertains specifically to the public sector, civil servants were retrenched as part of the cost-cutting, budget-balancing objectives of the IMF/World Bank market reform project for Africa. It has been suggested that the civil service retrenchments that occurred across Africa during the 1980s and 1990s represented perhaps the single most important episode of job loss in the history of the modern state system on the continent. Furthermore, the liquidation, commercialisation and privatisation of public enterprises fed into and reinforced the spiral of job losses; from an employment point of view, it did not seem to matter which option was adopted in the quest for public enterprise reform since all uniformly translated into the radical trimming down of the labour force. If anything, privatisation became virtually synonymous with the retrenchment of workers on a massive scale. What is worse, the mass graduation of young school leavers into a contracted labour market served to deepen the unemployment crisis that was unfolding. As a category, the youth were probably the group most hardly hit by the problems of employment experienced on the continent during the 1980s and 1990s. However, the social consequences of the problem were far wider, incorporating the extended family system, affecting the traditional pattern of urban-rural resource flows, and, as the migration of people, both employed and unemployed, to foreign shores accelerated, fuelling a new economy of international remittances that have become central to the survival strategies of individuals and households .

If, in some of the developed countries, the worst social effects of the economic restructuring that they had to undertake in response to competitive pressures and the challenges of globalisation, were effectively managed on account of the existence or adoption of robust social policy, the absence of such a framework in African countries exposed the citizenry to the full ravages of the market reform process. That this was so owes a great deal to the fact that the structural adjustment framework applied to African countries treated social policy as a residual category. The immediate social toll taken by IMF/World Bank market reform policies and which resulted in a plea by UNICEF and other organisations for adjustment with a human face (UNICEF, 1987) showed clearly the limitations of the "trickle" effects which the expected growth impact of the programme was expected to have. Not only did growth prove elusive in the short-run; it has remained so over almost two decades such that rates of 4 per cent which are just barely above population growth rates have come to be celebrated as grand stories of success. But more than the immediate social effects of structural adjustment, the entire philosophical foundation and orientation of the programme was hostile to the social sector which was the target for the most extensive cost-cutting and cost recovery measures. Even when, in the face of local and international pressure, attention began to be paid to the social sector, this was done more in terms of the introduction of programmes for mitigating the "unintended" social consequences of the structural adjustment. Yet, empirical research carried out across Africa suggests that these programmes failed to achieve their set objectives because they were poorly funded and the problems they were introduced to tackle - such as poverty - were too widespread as to make nonsense of efforts at targeting. In any case, the programmes were hardly organic to the structural adjustment framework; they were introduced as an "add on". And yet, the adjustment framework itself was at the root of many of the social problems that the programmes of mitigation were introduced to redress. Little wonder that the programmes failed to have the desired impact (Mhone, 1995; Vivian, 1995).

The main lesson from the failure of the social dimensions of structural adjustment to yield the desired results expected to flow from the introduction of mitigation programmes was that to be effect, social policy has to organic to the entire macro-economic framework and strategy. As African countries grappled with the challenges of globalisation, and as various high profile attempts were made to take stock of the lack-lustre experience of some two decades of structural adjustment, including an open admission by the incumbent President and a former Chief Economist of the World Bank of the failures experienced, there seemed to be signs that a more comprehensive approach to the social problems associated with or thrown up by economic reforms might finally emerge. It was in this context that, in 1999, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) began to be introduced to serve as a new framework for tackling Africa's problems in the context of globalisation; virtually all African countries have been encouraged to adopt the programme. The PRSPs have been presented as representing a departure from earlier stabilsation and adjustment experiences not only because they are supposedly more sensitive to poverty but they are also supposed to be imbued with strong country ownership, in addition to being the outcome of popular consultative processes with the poor, civil society groups, and other stakeholders such as employers. In support of the PRSPs, the IMF phased out its Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) and replaced it with the Pverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF). For its part, the World Bank introduced the Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC) scheme which can only be accessed by countries whose PRSPs have been approved. The PRSPs were also made an integral component of the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative (UNCTAD, 2002).

The PRSPs, in spite of the heavy investment that has made in marketing and popularising them have, however, been criticised as representing neither a promising developmental framework nor an effective strategy for promoting equity. Several reasons have been advanced for this point of view. The most important of these centres on the fact that the economic foundation on the basis of` which the PRSPs have been framed draw so heavily from the orthodox structural adjustment framework of the 1980s and 1990s as to suggest that, in substance, there is not much that is really new about them. Indeed, on close examination, the macroeconomic and structural adjustment policy content of the PRSPs simply replicate the principles and policies of the so-called "Washington Consensus". The pricist bias of the first generation of adjustment programmes is blended with the emphasis on "good governance" in the second generation of the adjustment programmes to constitute the broad economic foundation on which the PRSPS are built (ODI, 2001; UNCTAD,2002). Given that no serious effort has been made in the design of the PRSPs to question, revise and improve on the macroeconomic framework for policy making in Africa imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions during the 1980s and 1990s, many critics have been tempted to conclude that the PRSP has become a new name for orthodox structural adjustment. The implication of this conclusion is that the problem of poverty in Africa will continue to deepen on account of the basic incompatibility of the adjustment framework with poverty reduction and the promotion of equity. As noted by UNCTAD, "success in sustained reduction in poverty depends, inter alia, on a careful reassessment of the impact of stabilisation policies and structural reforms on economic growth and incomes and the well-being of the poor, and on reorienting them as needed" (UNCTAD,2002).

Equally disquieting for many critics is the fact that, like the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s, the contents of the PRSPs display a very high degree of uniformity across countries irrespective of the specific nature of their economic problems and the structural dimensions of the poverty they have to deal with. As with the adjustment programmes, the Bretton Woods institutions appear to be administering the same medicine in the same dosage to all their patients irrespective of the ailments of the patients and the severity of their problems. It was precisely this one-size-fits-all approach that contributed to failure of the adjustment programmes. The fact that the IMF and the World Bank also continue to play a strong, frontline role in the design of the PRSPs for different countries, a fact which has been well-documented, undermines all hope that the rhetoric of the Bretton Woods institutions on policy ownership by African government can be translated into the practice of reform implementation. In a vast majority of the countries where PRSPs have been produced, parliamentary scrutiny of the programmes has been systematically avoided or outrightly denied. In all cases, PRSPs purportedly produced on the principle of local ownership needed the formal seal of approval of the Bretton Woods institutions before they could be considered as accepted for the subsequent disbursement of concessional assistance. Furthermore, many governments felt themselves under pressure to conform to the policy expectations of the IMF and World Bank in the development of their PRSPs. When the replication of the principles of orthodox structural adjustment in the PRSPs is taken together with the deficit in local ownership of the programmes and the continued application of donor conditionality, including the new conditionality requiring each African country to have a PRSP, it would seem that the ultimate strategic consideration is to keep African countries tied to the very same orthodox market reform policies that, for over two decades, failed to deliver growth and which have shown themselves to be incapable of promoting equity and development.

An Agenda for further Research

It would seem from the various issues which have been raised in this essay, that there is considerable scope for theoretical and empirical research to be undertaken on the question of how development and equity issues can be made more central to the processes of globalisation. From an African point of view, it would seem that the biggest immediate challenge consists of renewing and retooling the state in order to enable it resume a role in the developmental process that goes way beyond the “night watchman” function that was assigned to it during the structural adjustment years and which threatens to continue under the regime of globalisation. The work that needs done to be both on the question of the African state more generally and an African developmental state more specifically is one which will involve theoretical and empirical research, including the deployment of comparative perspectives from other regions of the world. The research that is being proposed on the state should, if it to be useful, be multi-disciplinary in nature not just because of the greater likelihood of the emergence of a holistic overview, but also of the crucial importance of the state for the overall well-being of all sectors and facets of society.