

SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN AND THE SOULCRAFT ECONOMY

How ubuntu, the elusive Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) of the Soul of Nelson Mandela, and an African Women's family-focused agenda can embed planetary resilience and sustainability and show the way towards a sustainable economy that works for all...

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The major spiritual component of the Continent of Africa - given a thousand different words in a thousand different languages - is the deep primal human concept of ubuntu. It rejects the individualistic priorities of western civilisation as anti-human destructive assertions born of a juvenile period of development, and asserts that we are part of one another and can only prosper on that basis."

A PROGRESSIVE GROWTH OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond, in his award-winning 1997 book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, made the insightful observation that it literally took human beings hundreds of thousands of years to regularly meet new people without killing them.

As the history of cannibalism, slavery, colonialism, apartheid, ethnic genocide and continuing wars all over the world teaches us, the growth of the consciousness of the intrinsic value of every other human being is a progressive attainment. In millenias past, when humans weren't eating their perceived enemies, they were going to war against them, or enslaving them, or cheating them at business. Only slowly are we as a collective humanity evolving from apartheid to ubuntu, able to honour and protect the lives and human rights of others as we honour and protect our own lives and human rights. It comes as no surprise that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was only proclaimed and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as recently as 1948, after the devastation of a Second World War in less than 30 years killed more than 60 million people, about 3% of the 1940 world population of an estimated 2.3 billion people. It is

the greatest tragedy that 1948 was also, ironically, the year in which the ideology of apartheid became official government policy in South Africa.

Recent research further illustrates that domestic violence kills nine times more people, and costs the world nine times more, than all current wars combined. In seeking strategies of peace, human security and future sustainability and resilience, it is important that we move our focus away from our emphasis on "statecraft", or what governments must do, to an emphasis on soulcraft, or what citizens can do, to improve the quality of their own lives, and the quality of life of their families and communities.

COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND INDIVIDUAL SOULS

Nelson Mandela emphasized the need for an RDP of the Soul to complement the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that had been devised prior to 1994 to move South Africa from the vestiges of apartheid-era planning to a more inclusive, just and fair democratic dispensation.

The six basic principles of the RDP were identified as an "integrated and sustainable programme; a people-driven process; peace and security for all; nation-building; linking reconstruction and development; and the democratisation of South Africa."

While advocating for his still elusive dream of an RDP of the Soul in South Africa, Mandela famously kept his own Methodist Christian beliefs discreet "in favour of his great life work of reconciliation," fearing that speaking publicly about his own faith would cause division or be construed as proof that he was "using religion as a political tool, as the apartheid regime did."

Despite the fact that almost all wisdom traditions hold some doctrine of an "enduring entity" that survives death, the notion that we are the possessors of an undying and eternal human soul is not one that has universal currency. Buddhism, the one world religion without a God or a doctrine of the soul, is paradoxically the religion that comes closest to advocating a God-like path by teaching that the solutions to our problems are within ourselves, and that simplicity of needs and compassion will lead to wisdom and enlightenment.

Although Nelson Mandela is credited with first using the term RDP of the Soul, to which he also made reference in the Fifth Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town on 10 September 2004, to describe the work necessary in South Africa to heal and restore a nation after the extended denigration of people's humanity that took place during apartheid, it would be his successor, Thabo Mbeki, who would wax lyrical about the RDP of the Soul at a 2006 Nelson Mandela Lecture, stating that "because of the infancy of our brand new society, we have the possibility to act in ways that would, for the foreseeable future, infuse the values of ubuntu into our very being as a people."

He also cautioned that, "because the white minority was the dominant social force in our country, it entrenched in our society as a whole, including among the oppressed, the deep-seated understanding that personal wealth constituted the only true measure of individual and social success."

He urged South Africans to help define "a world of hope, radically different from the universe of despair" in order that "together, as Africans, we must build a society based on the noble precept that - *Motho ke motho ka motho yo mongoe: Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu!*"

QUALITY OF LIFE, GROWTH AND EQUALITY

The minimum values of social sustainability for families, societies and civilizations have been defined as life, quality of life, growth and equality, supported by the emotional values of love, empathy and compassion. In the book, *Social Sustainability for Community Builders*, it is suggested that these values are required as a basis for all our decision-making, from pre-conception to death, in order to encourage and nurture sustainable growth in the physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, social, cultural, and spiritual spheres of human development.

These are also at the same time the simple values of ubuntu or human kindness that describes how many indigenous communities operate intuitively, and they indicate a way towards reforming our political, economic and societal structures.

The book on social sustainability further suggests that any lasting changes that improve the quality of life of ordinary citizens always need to begin at the local level, and specifically, at family level.

THE ROLE OF FAMILIES IN THE RDP OF THE SOUL

“The family is a building block for community, nation, continent, and even planetary civilisation. Governments are notoriously bad at reaching the level of the household or family. Without intentional, continual attention to the health and well-being of every member of every family, ensuring that quality of life, growth and equality are built into the fabric of every family, humanity will not survive the challenges that await us.”eaching Mission Archives, 2013.

The collective wisdom of South Africa’s people, as summarised in the Preamble to the Constitution of South Africa, clearly indicated the content of Mandela’s suggested RDP of the Soul: A programme aimed at healing divisions, creating social justice, aligning governance structures to the will of the people, improving the quality of life of all citizens, and freeing the potential of each person.

Given the enormous levels of household poverty, racism, inter-generational trauma, family breakdown and father absence that were the legacies of apartheid design and practice, South African Women in Dialogue, a non-partisan civil society organisation with the mission of establishing a common agenda for the development of women, and to ensure that women’s views are taken into consideration whenever decisions are taken on all issues that impact on their lives, has emphasized the need for a national peace, healing, reconciliation and social cohesion programme since its establishment in 2003, as well as towards a psycho-social, family-based strategy to reduce poverty and inequality.

The post 2015 sustainable development agenda, including all the local, national, regional, continental, and global development goals, can be summarised in only 5 major categories:

- ✓ poverty eradication and economic empowerment
- ✓ cradle to grave education, training and skills development
- ✓ Health and human security, including reduction of war, crime, domestic violence and violence against women and children
- ✓ Partnerships and coordination, leaving no one behind (disability, sexual orientation, sex workers, migrants, rural and grassroots women, youth and children, etc.)
- ✓ Environmental sustainability and climate change
- ✓ It has been pointed out that the term “sustainable growth” is a contradiction in terms. There is an end to growth. Economists, historians, scientists, mystics and celestial

guides alike have cautioned that our existing patterns of behaviour, consumption and political and economic governance are impossible to maintain.

Jorgen Randers, a Professor at the Norwegian School of Management in Oslo, Norway, in an article entitled *What was the message of the Limits to Growth?* paraphrased the basic message of the Club of Rome's 1972 book, *Limits to Growth*, in these words:

"Global society is likely to overshoot – and then be forced to decline or collapse - because of significant reaction delays in the global economy. These are the unavoidable lags in the perception and localization of global limits, the significant institutional delays involved in (democratic) decision making, and the biophysical lags between implementation of remedial action and the improvement of the ecosystem."

Just like the unjust, unequal, and ultimately, profoundly unsustainable system of "apartheid" had to give way to a more democratic and inclusive system, human civilization is noticing that our current strategies of growth do not deliver either lasting peace or meaningful human development at the level of the family or the individual.

If Africa is to become "the pupil of the eye of humanity", as the Founder of the Bahai Faith Bahá'u'lláh predicted; the darkest place where the most light will enter, it will require that the women of Africa seize the incredible opportunity afforded them by the remaining three years of the African Decade of Women and Mandela's still elusive RDP of the Soul to demand that budgets be made available to develop human sustainability at the level of the individual and the family.

SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN AS "CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE"

In 2011 and 2012 South African women articulated their priorities for the National Development Plan in the SA Women as Champions of Change provincial and national dialogues co-hosted by SA Women in Dialogue (SAWID) and the International Women's Forum of SA (IWFSa), with the support of the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

The priorities of SA women were defined as;

- ✓ A psycho-social, family based poverty eradication approach, combined with a productive self-reliance and economic empowerment strategy
- ✓ Accessible, quality and affordable early childhood education
- ✓ A strategy to reduce violence against women and children
- ✓ Civil society coordination
- ✓ Income generation in all these areas

An evidenced-based research study was commissioned to explore national and global best practices in solving these seemingly intractable human development challenges.

If it is indeed true, as has been pointed out earlier, that domestic violence kills more people than wars, with estimates of about nine people killed in domestic disputes for every one person who dies in a civil war, we should be greatly concerned about the future sustainability of humanity, as the family acts as the first peace-building unit of society, and the place where men and women first learn to "adjust their antagonisms." Social cohesion and human security cannot take place in the absence of family cohesion and family security.

TOOLS FOR EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY AT FAMILY LEVEL

South African women have clearly indicated the following strategies to achieve their goals of inter-generational healing, poverty eradication and productive self-reliance:

- ✓ **A focus on the family as unit of analysis, and the training and employment of family development workers, while exploring the use of the Poverty Stoplight tool of family self-diagnosis to measure and ensure equal growth from cradle to grave, and to equally coordinate and distribute available resources that serve the restoration of the family.**
- ✓ **Small healing dialogue circles and co-creative design teams at ward level for personal and societal healing, to articulate local priorities, and to ensure inclusive local solution-formation.**
- ✓ **A tool to link local decisions and solutions that emerge from communities to municipal budgeting processes, and outcomes of the Poverty Stoplight tool per geographic area to SALGA Municipal Barometer and Stats SA census data, as well as to available assets, budgets, and resources in civil society, the private sector and all levels of government, to ensure equal growth. (This amounts to a geo-mapping of community needs and assets, linked to a geo-mapping of available resources and expertise in the community, civil society, government, donor organizations and the private sector.)**

USING THE RDP OF THE SOUL AND AN AFRICAN WOMEN'S AGENDA TO BEND SOCIETIES TOWARDS POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

It is difficult for most people to see how the future of our planet will be affected by a profoundly unsustainable and unequal global macro-economic framework, where the 8 wealthiest individuals now own as much wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest of earth's inhabitants and by unsustainable political systems based on self-interested party-political considerations rather than the well-being of individuals and families.

South African women are highlighting that attaining social and economic sustainability and Mandela's elusive RDP of the Soul will require an enormous shift towards a focus on the family as unit of analysis, and towards the kind of remunerated work that will ensure the well-being of every member of every family (family here defined as "two people who share a budget"). In terms of future planetary sustainability, it is becoming clear that all our considerable resources should be applied towards creating resilience and sustainability at the level of families, through the use of trained and remunerated family development workers, and the geo-mapping of indicators of family well-being at ward level.

It has additionally been suggested that the well-being of every member of every family, in effect the attainment of Nelson Mandela's elusive dream of an RDP of the Soul, can best be done through family clinics, a new social institution that will be needed to enculturate each new generation with the best practices of conscious and sustainable child rearing and parenting.

The professionalization of this soulcraft economy in Africa will encourage both men and women to be trained in and paid for providing those services of poverty-eradication, care-giving, family development, inter-generational healing, counselling and early childhood development that most serve the family unit. By prioritising productive self-reliance and income generation in areas of human need and soul development, including holistic health and inter-generational healing, food security and family development, African women can embed resilience and sustainability at local levels, ensuring the human and societal well-being that will become so critical in the years to come.