

WHERE IS THE WEALTH OF NATIONS?

Talking points, by Dr G. Odera Outa, Advisor, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Government of the Republic of Kenya, On the occasion of DBSA/World Bank, Development Dialogue, 20th June 2007, at the DBSA Headquarters, Johannesburg, South Africa.

- The occasion of the unveiling of this publication-yet another- by the World Bank is most welcome. My perusal of sections of the book, confirms as ever, that, it is a formidable intellectual collaborative, evident in putting out for the first time, 'the millennium capital assessment, and aptly subtitled, 'measuring capital for the 21st century'. The story seems to me to stem from a conceptual model of 'natural capital Vs Produced capital', that latter being also a confirmation of the role of knowledge and skills in shifting the base of wealth from the purely natural, to those that reside largely in human capital. As usual, a contribution of this kind aims *interalia*, at informing and improving policy making, towards, 'sustainable outcomes'.
- Speaking, just as a modest layman; and as someone whose job entails a close working relationship with policy makers and contributing the usual 'two cents worth' to the dynamic of development: I will be the first to acknowledge that it is a word that has become a hydra-of some kind. Like many Africans, I am a consumer of development; I am its object and target; a consumer of its products; an ever waiting victim of its failure to deliver and an hopeful citizen of the 21st century hopeful that something will happen that truly transforms livelihoods for the majority in the continent. The question for us must be based on a slight paraphrase: **where is the African wealth?**
- On the whole question of 'sustainability': the word has been around for some time now. Perhaps in our own context, we must try to ensure that it ceases to be just another type of politically correct vocabulary, which means nothing beyond its enunciation. It may be necessary to ask if the vast majority of policy makers in Africa are capable of deeply commiserating with some of the issues, say around sustainability' as raised in the volume. Who are the consumers of this wealth of knowledge? Are they, indeed, our policy makers? Are they capable of engaging with 'a model assessment of capital' in our respective countries? It is indeed disturbing that the message about the fragility of natural capital is one that has hardly sank deep enough, because for many ordinary folk the connection between habits that completely devastate the environment and the wealth of nations is remote one. The ordinary folk is perhaps, ultimate the custodian of the natural resource. In the cut throat of modern living, indigenous African knowledges have completely been relegated. Unless we make a conscious campaign to mainstream these knowledges, the future can be very bleak indeed. The point is that the ordinary folk in Kenya's Mau escarpment are perhaps not aware that the forest cover that has born so much of their ire is, indeed, half the country's water tower; nor is the connections between this and the booming tourism industry one is that readily appreciated. But to ask these folk to literally worship the forest and ensure that the wealth equation remains stable is indeed a tall order. It is precisely because if ordinary folk are not part of the produced wealth, no amount of policing works because for them all living is then eked out of the land.

- Do we need more policies?
- Is it possible to simplify policy making documents and render it it more relevant? Is political consideration not superior to the best policies? How about the role of implementation?