



**REPORT OF A ONE-DAY CIVIL SOCIETY  
CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON  
THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT  
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (NEEDS)**

**19 May 2004**

**ORGANIZED BY ABANTU FOR DEVELOPMENT**

**WITH SUPPORT FROM PROSPECT-NIGERIA**



## INTRODUCTION

ABANTU for Development is a non-governmental development organization founded in 1991 by African women for the purpose of harnessing resources for the benefit of African people. ABANTU focuses on training, provision of information and advice on mobilization of resources towards sustainable development in Africa. It envisages a world in which women and men are equal partners in decision making at all levels.

ABANTU is one of PROSPECT's five grantees. Promoting Stakeholder Participation in Economic Transition (PROSPECT) is a USAID funded economic governance project. The PROSPECT project is aimed at strengthening the capacity of a selected group of economic policy stakeholder groups to participate more effectively in the process of economic policy reform.

In an attempt to find an efficient and effective economic development program for the nation, past regimes and leaders have at various times initiated different economic reforms. These reforms range from Shagari's austerity to the Stabilization Programs of General Buhari's regime; Babangida introduced the Structural Adjustment Program, while General Abacha envisioned Vision 2010. The present administration of President Obasanjo has introduced the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS).

In all of these the interest of the Nigerian people was said to be pivotal, ironically these same people were at their best reluctant to give full backing to these programs with the justification that the reform process (right from the formulation to the implementation) was elitist and failed to demonstrably carry the generality of the people along. The agendas were also criticized for their neo-liberal economic doctrines and their being tailor guided by external interest such as the IMF and the World Bank.

The present administration in seeking to fulfill the same objective of economic reform and a better life for Nigerians and has decided to steer a different course. In doing this it has decided to embrace the key elements of success; participation and transparency. This was demonstrated by the public presentation of the document in the six geopolitical zones of the country and the call for inputs and suggestions from all stakeholders.

This report is a summary of the civil society consultative forum organized by ABANTU for Development on the NEEDS document. The aim of the forum was to

- Create space for policy makers, women activists and gender analysts to x-ray the document and highlight key gender concerns as presented or omitted by the document.
- Strategize on how to effectively dialogue, engage and monitor the implementation of the strategy.
- Build alliances that would further help to mainstream gender issues into future economic and development reforms.
- To present the recommendations/observations of the forum to the NEEDS committee.

## **Attendance**

The consultative forum was attended by a total of twenty participants, representing women organizations, policy makers, civil society organizations, NGOs and the media.

## **PAPER PRESENTATION**

In his introduction the resource person Mal Hussaini Abdu observed that in response to the devastating economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Nigerian state has carried out series of economic policy experiments. Among them are Shagari's introduced Austerity Measure, Buhari's had Stabilization Policy, Babangida's Structural Adjustment Program, Abacha's Vision 2010 and Obasanjo is now introducing National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS).

These policies he noted may have been different in names and major actors in the reform process; they all however share the same ideological roots. All the policies are defined in the context of neo-liberal economic doctrine. The extent of economic liberalization may differ. For instance, Buhari and Abacha's neo-liberal economic policy came in with some elements of state control and moderation. This is different from Babangida and Obasanjo's IMF and World Bank inspired reform policies.

According to him, the ideological foundation of these policies is their conception of the state as the main obstacle to economic development: It is over bloated, extravagant, parasitic and weak against social forces like workers and urban poor. The agenda was to restructure the state and adjust the economy.\* This involved a serious reduction in state's expenditure pattern, especially in the provision of social services and support for the poor by bringing it under the discipline and rationality of the market.

## **NEEDS DOCUMENT**

In analyzing the document, Hussaini described NEEDS as Nigeria's "home-grown" poverty reduction and economic development strategy. The document, he further noted, is divided into four parts. Part one provides the introduction and micro-economic framework: This deal with the challenges of Nigerian economy, the statement of vision, values and principles. Part Two titled "reforming government institutions" deals with public sector reform, security and administration of justice, corruption, promotion of accountability and transparency. Part three is about growing the private sector; this dwells on developing the private sector, specific sectoral strategies, trade and regional policies. Part Four is concerned with social character and implementation strategies. This is principally concern with human development agenda, implementation and financing the NEEDS project.

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\* Abdu, H. 2004, 'Deregulation, Monetization, Gender and Women Empowerment in Nigeria' Women's Advocate, LEADS, Kaduna.

Speaking further the Political Scientist opined that coming from the manner in which the economy has been managed since 1999, NEEDS is a welcome development for the following reasons;

- The document clearly identified problems with the public sector – corruption, insecurity, debt, failure service delivery etc;
- The document provides framework for new laws to enhance accountability and transparency;
- It provides clearly for the condition of women and seeks to empower them and
- It also provides for strategic partnering with civil society; labor etc. in the implementation of the project.

The NEEDS he added is nationally coordinated with states and local government (SEEDS – State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy), aimed at poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation and value re-orientation. He highlighted the core values as: enterprise, competition and efficiency at all levels; equity and care for the weak and vulnerable; moral rectitude, respect for traditional values and extolling of our culture; a value system of public service delivery to citizens and discipline at all levels of leadership.

“For the authors of NEEDS”, he stated, “the document is different in both process and content from the past economic development Blueprints. The process of arriving at the document is seen to be participatory, federalist planning and the content is realistic, focused and reform based”.

The goals of NEEDS he further pointed out are to be achieved through four strategies namely reform of government institutions, growing the private sector, social character and value reorientation.

### **A Critical Look at NEEDS**

Mal. Hussaini pointed out that “while NEEDS may to some extent differ in process and content, it is essentially a neo-liberal document prepared by market fundamentalist with the support of the “unholy” trinity of the IMF, World Bank and the WTO”. “The character, views and ideological stand points of the Breton-Wood institutions and the WTO are clearly reflected in the document from the conception of the state to the solution to the socio-economy problem of the country”. He added that as a PRSP document NEEDS couldn’t claim to be an internally developed framework, since it is essentially a response to growing criticism of the SAP regime by the IMF and the World Bank. He however noted that although the PRSP is supposed to be developed internally, it is guided by clearly defined neo-liberal ideology. The policy he emphasized is premised on the belief that the state should keep out of economic activities.

### **NEEDS and Women**

In drawing parallels, the speaker noted that Neo-liberal theory has a general ontological bias against women. The paradigm underestimates and even ignores the pervasiveness of gender discrimination and inequality in society and treating it as aberration. According to Mal Hussaini

the fundamental problem is simply that almost all economic variables, categories and relations are gendered therefore basic decision making unit itself, the household, is the fulcrum of gender discrimination and inequality, and the major vehicle for their reproduction in society as a whole. In essence, economic facts are not neutral but gender bias from the outset.

In further analysis Mal Hussaini noted that the micro economic efficiency and equilibrium conditions derived on the basis of these gender biased factors cannot be accepted as women friendly. It is in this theoretical problem that the first limitation of NEEDS as it relates to women lies.

He however noted that NEEDS document is arguably the first time the government is declaring commitment to affirmative action and domestication of CEDAW. Apart from this, the document, he pointed out, like most other government document did not provide a connection between the provisions and the document. Elaborating further, he stressed that there is no connection between the claim to have 30% representation of women and all other provisions of the document. "There is nowhere in the document where it is indicated in gender disaggregated statistic on the role of women in the reform program and how they will be made to benefit from such programs" he added.

Referring to the implementation strategy, he noted that the private sector in which the entire reform program is anchored has the least representation of women. The speaker also drew attention to women's limited capital, the high level of poverty and lack of jobs and questioned the capability of the private sector to redress these. These he said are some of the fundamental questions that the document failed to address.

Mal Hussaini argued that: "privatization from our recent experience and the experiences of other third world countries has not helped in creating jobs or reducing poverty any where. It has remained as a process of subsidizing capital to the detriment of the citizenry. Privatization is part of the general pattern of undermining social organization and popular power and reversing social welfare. It is a counter reform program against historical trends and parts of a general effort to subvert the welfare state, mixed economies and class-based social movements. The program is not women friendly. As argued by James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, while proponents of free market defend the traditional family, their policies encourage the creation of single-parent families and forced labor of women for low wages. Although this is understood by some feminist to mean women's independent and empowerment. Privatization undermines the stable social foundation of class and family necessary to sustain concerted political opposition. The end result is the weakening of democracy and the imposition of authoritarianism".

In further critical analysis, the Resource Person noted that the commitment to downsizing the work force contradicts the documents' aim of creating jobs. This he argued is because the document has failed to tell us in concrete terms how those that may possibly lose their jobs will be resettled. Similarly, there is contradiction between governments' commitment to poverty reduction and increase in school fees, bed space and the withdrawal from the provisions of some basic social facilities. With the increase in the cost of education and health care women are bound to be negatively affected.

## **NEEDS Politics and the Nigerian Constitution**

The document has remained blind to the Nigerian politics. While acknowledging the successful civilian to civilian transition, it failed to recognize the fraud in the last general election and the instability of the polity and its implications for the economic reform program. How for instance can you check corruption in a government that came into power through electoral fraud? The document failed to reflect on the increasing agitation for electoral reform, constitutional reform and even resource control.

The process of drafting the document is anything but participatory. The process is highly technocratic and autocratic. Proper account was not taken of Nigerian federal character. Some of the provisions of the document negate some provisions of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. Under chapter 2 of the constitution, section 16(1), active state involvement in the management of the economy. It provides that the economy should be operated in such a manner as not to permit the concentration of wealth and means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or a group. The implication of this section is that the state is directed to run a mixed economy where the government and private sector are free to operate in virtually all sectors of the economy including the major sectors of the economy. The fact that the government has gone ahead to implement some provisions of NEEDS like deregulation, deepening privatization and the design of the 2004 budget in the context of NEEDS is clear reflection of the non-commitment to public input into the document. Summation

## **Recommendations**

In his final summation Mal Abdu made the following recommendations:

1. The people must be allowed to debate the economy and decide on the path they want to follow in reforming the economy. Neither the government nor the IMF and the World Bank be allowed to imposed any ideologically based reform policy on the government.
2. NEEDS has to be strengthened in the area of democratic governance. It should embrace electoral and constitutional reforms to make room for democratic federalism.
3. The document should move from a medium term plan through a participatory process to a long term development agenda.
4. The document should address the tension between the 1999 constitution and the provisions of the NEEDS document, particularly as it relates to how the Nigerian economy should be run.
5. Gender and women issues need to be mainstreamed in every section or segment of the document.

**Discussions:**

One of the first concerns to be raised was the relevance of the call for civil society input into the NEEDS document. The concern arose from the fact that the Federal government has admitted to having already started the implementation of the strategy. Some of the participants argued that if the government has based the 2004 annual budget on the strategy then they (the Federal Government) were already in violation of the second strategy: Reforming Government Institutions, which talks about public sector reform, promotion of accountability and transparency.

In response to this some other participants expressed the opinion that the forum would be more relevant in strategizing for involvement and participation at the state levels through the States Economic and Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS).

The issue of the validity of the claim of the document as the people's strategy also came up for debate. The view expressed was that there wasn't so much public participation at the drafting stage. However some other people were of the opinion that so far, it is the most participatory government strategy, for which the Obasanjo administration deserves some commendations.

# NEEDS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA<sup>1</sup>

BY  
HUSSAINI ABDU<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

In response to the devastating economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Nigerian state has carried out series of economic policy experiments. Among them are Shagari's Austerity Measure, Buhari's Stabilization Policy, Babangida's Structural Adjustment Programme, Abacha's Vision 2010 and Obasanjo is now introducing the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). These policies may be different in names and major actors in the reform process; they all however share the same ideological roots. All the policies are defined in the context of neo-liberal economic doctrine. The extent of economic liberalization may differ. For instance, Buhari and Abacha's neo-liberal economic policy came in with some elements of state control and moderation. This is different from Babangida and Obasanjo's IMF and World Bank inspired reform policies.

The ideological foundation of these policies is their conception of the state as the main obstacle to economic development. It is over bloated, extravagant, parasitic and weak against social forces like workers and urban poor. The agenda was to restructure the state and adjust the economy.<sup>3</sup> This involved a serious reduction in state's expenditure pattern, especially in the provision of social services and support for the poor by bringing it under the discipline and rationality of the market.

Our aim in this paper is to discuss the NEEDS document with special interest on its implications on women empowerment. The paper is therefore broadly divided into two sections. First, I made a general over of the NEEDS document to acquaint participants with the contents and objectives of the document. Second, I tried to take critical look at the document in the context of women empowerment.

## NEEDS DOCUMENT

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is Nigeria's "home-grown" poverty reduction and economic development strategy. The document is divided into four parts. Part one provides the introduction and micro-economic frame work: This deals with

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<sup>1</sup> Discussion paper Presented at a Consultative Forum on National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) organized by ABANTU for Development on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2004.

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<sup>3</sup> Abdu, H. 2004, "Deregulation, Monetization, Gender and Women Empowerment in Nigeria" Women's Advocate, LEADS, Kaduna.

the challenges of Nigerian economy, the statement of vision, values and principles. Part Two, titled “reforming government institutions,” deals with public sector reform, security and administration of justice, corruption, promotion of accountability and transparency. Part three is about growing the private sector. This dwells on developing the private sector, specific sectoral strategies, trade and regional policies. Part Four is concerned with social character and implementation strategies. This is principally concerned with the human development agenda, implementation and financing the NEEDS project.

Coming from a manner in which the economy has been managed since 1999, NEEDS is a welcome development. The document is a welcome development for the following reasons:

- The document clearly identified problems with the public sector – corruption, insecurity, debt, failed service delivery, etc.
- The document provides a framework for new laws to enhance accountability and transparency.
- It provides clearly for the condition of women and seeks to empower them.
- It also provides for strategic partnering with civil society, labor etc. in the implementation of the project.

The NEEDS is a nationally coordinated strategy with states and local government (SEEDS), aimed at poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation and value re-orientation. Its core values are: enterprise, competition and efficiency at all levels; equity and care for the weak and vulnerable; moral rectitude, respect for traditional values and extolling of our culture; a value system of public service delivery to citizens and discipline at all levels of leadership. For the authors of NEEDS, the document is different in both process and content from the past economic development blueprints. The process of arriving at the document is seen to be participatory, federalist in nature and the content is realistic, focused and reform based. The goals of NEEDS are to be achieved through four strategies.

## **1. Reform of Government Institutions.**

This is well conceded in part 2 chapter 4 of the document. The chapter noted that the share of government intervention in the economy is unduly large. For example consolidated government expenditure was observed to have risen from 29% of GDP in 1997 to 50% in 2001. That the government is still involved in service delivery activities which it cannot deliver properly, there are conflicts in service delivery between the tiers of government and institutionalization of corruption. The policy thrust in this regard is to:

- Right-size the sector and eliminate ghost workers.
- Re-professionalize the public service.
- Rationalize, restructure and strengthen institutions.
- Privatization and liberalization program.
- Tackle corruption and improve transparency in government accounts.
- Reduce waste and improve the efficiency of government expenditure.

In achieving these objectives the government will encourage an open and competitive tender arrangement for government contracts, establish a due process mechanism to vet and eliminate

“excess fat” from government contracts, anti-corruption campaign and public sector reform. Beyond these, the NEEDS attempt to redefine the role of government in the economy. The government will be withdrawn from the production of goods and concentrate on service delivery whose key areas will be education, health, water supply, science and technology and capacity building. Infrastructural services will be shared between the public and the private sector, donor community and the users through special arrangements like: Build Operate and Transfer (BOT); Repair Operate and Transfer (ROT); and Build Own, Operate and Transfer (BOOT). Public sector reform will also entail the most popularized monetization of fringe benefits.

## **2. Growing the Private sector**

The document observes the growing dominance of public sector, over reliance on oil and the pursuit of a highly import-dependent strategy. The private sector has equally been observed to be dominated by a few huge multinationals that are heavily import-dependent and mostly operating as enclaves. The sector is also characterized as rent seeking and an unproductive culture of over dependence on government patronage and contracts with little value-added. NEEDS therefore intends to diversify the economic base and reduce the relative dominance of the oil sector; mainstream the informal sector while the linkages to the rest of the sector are strengthened. The private sector will be expected to take a more pro-active stance in terms of creating productive jobs, enhancing productivity levels and generally improving the quality of life of people.

This section also provides for infrastructural development covering the transport sector, power sector, water resources, environmental protection and conservation. There are also specific sectoral strategies like agriculture and food security, manufacturing, including micro, small and medium scale enterprises, services, banking and other financial services sector, oil, gas and mineral sector and solid mineral development.

## **3. Social Character**

Social character in the context NEEDS means to improve the quality of life of Nigerians significantly and create social safety nets for the vulnerable section of the populace as well as to cater for those displaced by the dynamics of the reform process. NEEDS’ target in this regard is:

- Average per-capita consumption growth of at least 2% per annum.
- Creation of about 7 million jobs over the period 2004-2007.
- Increase in immunization coverage to 60% by 2007.
- Increase access to safe drinking water to an average of at least 70% (urban and rural).
- Adult literacy rate of at least 65% by 2007.

The section also provides for specific sectoral targets for education, health care, housing, employment creation, women and youth empowerment, safety net, peace and internal security. On education for instance, the strategies include faithful implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE), review of school curricula at all levels, re-tooling and re-positioning of technical schools at all levels, establishment of vocational training centers, expanding special

education, university autonomy and diversification of funding, etc. For health care, the policy thrust includes reducing disease burden to priority diseases and health problems including malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and reproductive ill health. On women the thrust is to ensure equitable representation of not less than 30% in major facets of life, promote affirmative action, domesticate CEDAW, provide legislation to abolish all harmful traditional practices, mainstreaming women concerns, scholarship schemes at secondary and tertiary levels etc.

#### **4. Implementation and Finance**

This section deals with the sources of finance for the implementation of NEEDS. The sources are from the private sector and donor organizations.

#### **A Critical Look at NEEDS**

While NEEDS may to some extent differ in process and content, it is essentially a neo-liberal document prepared by market fundamentalist with the support of the “unholy” trinity of the IMF, World Bank and the WTO. The character, views and ideological stand points of the Breton-Wood institutions and the WTO are clearly reflected in the document from the conception of the state to the solution to the socio-economy problem of the country. As a PRSP document NEEDS cannot claim to be an internally developed framework, since it is essentially a response to growing criticism of the SAP regime by the IMF and the World Bank. Although the PRSP is supposed be developed internally, it is guided by a clearly defined neo-liberal ideology. The policy premises on the belief that the state should keep off economic activities. The program is basically predicated on neo-liberal general equilibrium model. Neoliberalism rests on economism and marketism, as achieved by means of privatization, liberalization and deregulation.<sup>4</sup> The major assumption implicit in the policy is consistent with those of the neo-liberal model in which a free market situation, with prices reflecting true scarcity values within economy, and resource allocation is basically the responsibility of the price mechanism, ensures efficient economy allocation of resources and stimulate growth of the economy. The assumption that the laws of supply and demand are best suited for deregulation makes the policy consistent with monetarist philosophy which in its basic form insists that an economy when allowed to operate without government interference is capable of ensuring optimal allocation of resources.

#### **NEEDS and Women**

Neoliberal theory has a general ontological bias against women. The paradigm underestimates and even ignores the pervasiveness of gender discrimination and inequality in society and treats it as aberration.<sup>5</sup> The fundamental problem is simply that almost all economic variables, categories and relations are gendered. The basic decision making unit itself, the household, is the

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<sup>4</sup> Scholte, J. A. 2002 “The source of Neoliberal Globalization”. Paper for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

<sup>5</sup> Mhone, G. 1997, “Gender Bias in Economics and the search for a Gender-Sensitive Approach”. In Imam, A. M. Mama, A. and Sow, F. *Engendering African Social Sciences*, CODESRIA, Dakar.

fulcrum of gender discrimination and inequality, and the major vehicle for their reproduction in society as a whole. In essence, economic facts are not neutral but gender biased from the outset.<sup>6</sup> Therefore the micro economic efficiency and equilibrium conditions derived on the basis of these gender biased factors cannot be accepted as women friendly. It is in this theoretical problem that the first limitation of NEEDS as it relates to women lies.

The NEEDS document is arguably the first time the government is declaring commitment to affirmative action and domestication of CEDAW. Apart from this, the document, like most other government documents, did not provide a connection between the provisions and the documents. There is no connection between the claim to have 30% representation of women and all other provisions of the document. There is no where in the document where it is indicated in gender disaggregated statistics on the role of women in the reform program and how they will be made to benefit from such programs.

The private sector in which the entire reform program is anchored has the least representation of women. How are women going to benefit? With little capital to their disposal how are women going to benefit from privatization? How can privatization check poverty and encourage job creation? These are some of the fundamental questions the document failed to respond to. Privatization from our present experience and the experiences of other developing countries has not help in creating jobs or reducing poverty anywhere. It has remained as a process of subsidizing capital to the detriment of the citizenry. Privatization is part of the general pattern of undermining social organization and popular power and reversing social welfare. It is a counter reform program against historical trends and parts of a general effort to subvert the welfare state, mixed economies and class-based social movements. The program is not women-friendly. As James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer argued, while proponents of free market defend the traditional family, their policies encourage the creation of single-parent families and forced labor of women for low wages.<sup>7</sup> Although this is understood by some feminists to mean women's independence and empowerment, privatization undermines the stable social foundation of class and family necessary to sustain concerted political opposition.<sup>8</sup> The end result is the weakening of democracy and the imposition of authoritarianism.

The commitment to downsizing the workforce contradicts the documents' aim of creating jobs. This is because the document has failed to tell us in concrete terms how those that may possibly lose their jobs will be resettled. Similarly, there is a contradiction between governments' commitment to poverty reduction and an increase in school fees and the withdrawal from the provisions of some basic social facilities. With the increase in the cost of education and health care women are bound to be negatively affected.

### **NEEDS Politics and the Nigerian Constitution**

The document has remained blind to Nigerian politics. While acknowledging the successful civilian to civilian transition, it failed to recognize the fraud in the last general election and the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer 2001, *Globalization Unmasked*, PP. 94

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

instability of the polity and its implications for the economic reform program. How for instance can you check corruption in a government that came into power through electoral fraud? The document failed to reflect on the increasing agitation for electoral reform, constitutional reform and even resource control.

The process of drafting the document was anything but participatory. The process was highly technocratic and autocratic. Proper account was not taken of the Nigerian federal character. Some of the provisions of the document negate some provisions of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Under chapter 2 of the constitution, section 16(1), active state involvement in the management of the economy. It provides that the economy should be operated in such a manner as not to permit the concentration of wealth and means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or a group. The implication of this section is that the state is directed to run a mixed economy where the government and private sector are free to operate in virtually all sectors of the economy including the major sectors of the economy. The fact that the government has gone ahead to implement some provisions of NEEDS like deregulation, deepening privatization and the design of the 2004 budget in the context of NEEDS is a clear reflection of the non-commitment to public input into the document.

### **Recommendations**

1. The people must be allowed to debate the economy and decide on the path they want to follow in reforming the economy. Neither the government nor the IMF and the World Bank can be allowed to impose any ideologically based reform policy on the government.
2. NEEDS has to be strengthened in the area of democratic governance. It should embrace electoral and constitutional reforms to make room for democratic federalism.
3. The document should move from a medium term plan through a participatory process to a long term development agenda.
4. The document should address the tension between the 1999 constitution and the provisions of the NEEDS document, particularly as it relates to how the Nigerian economy should be run.
5. Gender and women issues need to be mainstreamed in every section or segment of the document.

**PARTICIPANTS LIST FOR CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON  
THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (NEEDS)**

**19 May 2004**

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