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## Vision for a Better World: From Economic Crisis to Equality

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Devaki Jain and Diane Elson, in Collaboration with the Casablanca Dreamers

## Introduction

While the last 15 years have witnessed the fulfilment, in *some* countries, for *some* women, of *some* of the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), it has been in a context of widening inequality<sup>1</sup>, between countries, between social classes, between women. Globalization has brought rapid growth of GDP to some developing countries and prosperity to many people but not to the majority; it has exacerbated the challenges of feeding the world,<sup>2</sup> of obtaining clean water<sup>3</sup> leading to an increasing burden for women in fetching and accessing water,<sup>4</sup> to energy shortages,<sup>5</sup> and to climate change and ecological disasters.<sup>6</sup> The financial crisis of 2008/9 provided a new opportunity for rethinking social and economic policies in all countries, for creating ideas of development that would be redistributive, inclusive, environmentally sustainable and socially just for everyone. This paper is a contribution to such thinking.

This paper is the outcome of a process of discussion that began at a meeting in Casablanca, Morocco, in January 2007, where a group of women thinkers and activists<sup>7</sup> from a variety of countries dared to dream of a better world in which the deprivations faced by women trapped in poverty situations can be removed through new roads to progress and prosperity.<sup>8</sup> The conversations continued in July 2007 in Istanbul, Turkey, and in October 2008 in Rabat, Morocco, under the auspices of the UNDP. The Rabat colloquium discussed *Assessing Development Paradigms through Women's Knowledge*, based on sixteen papers commissioned by UNDP<sup>9</sup>, all of which we reference in this paper. In July 2009, a working group met at the South Centre in Geneva to discuss how ideas from the papers could be used to produce a paper

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Davies, Susanna Sandstrom, Anthony Shorrocks, and Edward N. Wolff. World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United Nations University (UNU-WIDER) on the World Distribution of Household Wealth, 5 December 2006; Deere, Carmen and Doss, Cheryl. "Gender and the Distribution of Wealth in Developing Countries." UN-WIDER Paper No. 2006/115, October 2006; Seguino, Stephanie. Speech at the Commission for the Status of Women, United Nations, New York: March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *The State of Food Insecurity in the World – Economic Crisis: Impacts and Lessons Learned*. Economic and Social Development Department, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations: Rome, October 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Fall, Yassine. "Paying the Price: The Cost of the Commoditization of Food and Water for Women." Rabat, 2008. Essay for forthcoming book. p1.

<sup>4</sup> Mernissi, Fatema. *NGOs of the High Atlas*. Casablanca, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Castaneda Camey, Itza and Gammage, Sarah. "Gender Dimensions and the Global Crises in the Context of Climate Change." Essay for forthcoming book. 6.

<sup>6</sup> "Growth is Good... Isn't it?" *The Guardian*. 25 Jan 2010. Accessed on 29 Jan 2010 and available at: [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2010/jan/25/uk-growth-energy-resources-boundaries](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cif-green/2010/jan/25/uk-growth-energy-resources-boundaries)

<sup>7</sup> The list of members of the Casablanca Group can be accessed on: [www.casablanca-dream.net](http://www.casablanca-dream.net)

<sup>8</sup> *Rethinking Poverty: Report on the World's Social Situation 2010*. Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: New York, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Authors: Diane Elson, Devaki Jain, Stephanie Seguino, Lourdes Beneria, Naoko Otobe, Lanyan Chen, Marta Nunez Sarmiento, Itza Castaneda and Sarah Gammage, Jael Silliman, Hiroko Hara, Hope Chigudu, Patricia McFadden, Renana Jhabvala, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Solita Collas Monsod and Yassine Fall.

for the 2010 Commission on the Status of Women. This paper is based on the draft produced in the Geneva meeting and subsequent email discussions.

We envision a world that enhances and builds the capacities and creativities of *all* people. It rejects the narrow understanding of economic activity in terms of the “*efficient*” choices of “*rational economic man*” and draws on the feminist political economy conception of economic activity as a system of provisioning, guided by social norms; and structured by social interests. The paper challenges the idea that the desirable outcome of policy responses to the crisis is a return to “normal”, and argues for alternatives that not only effectively respond to the crisis and its negative consequences on the livelihoods of many people, but also facilitate a transition towards the creation of more just and inclusive economies.<sup>10</sup> In considering alternatives, we explore the notions of a “just economy” and of building “economic democracy”. Central to this is the envisioning of institutions, structures and practices which go beyond those associated with “political democracy” and its associated civil and political rights. In practice, this often consists only of periodic elections of representatives to legislatures and councils, but gives poor people little or no say in the overall direction of economic policy. Economic policy decisions are increasingly dominated by corporate interests.<sup>11</sup> Economic democracy requires respecting, protecting and fulfilling the entire existing spectrum of rights, including economic and social rights, as well as civil and political rights. It requires the construction of “economic constitutions” like the one that Gandhi envisaged for India in 1928:

*According to me the economic constitution of India and for that matter of the world, should be such that no one under it should suffer from want of food and clothing. In other words, everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable [them] to make the two ends meet. And this ideal can be universally realized only if the means of the production of the elementary necessities of life remain in the control of the masses. ...The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of the destitution that we witness today not only in this unhappy land but in other parts of the world too.*<sup>12</sup>

There is no ready-made blueprint for what this would mean in practice, both within and between countries, and the details are bound to differ in different times and places, but we invite readers to join with us in taking up the challenge of translating this principle into specific institutions, policies and processes.

**Section One** focuses on the gender dimensions of the recent and ongoing crises of not only finance and employment but also deprivation of food, water, energy, fuel and care; and of environmental devastation.

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<sup>10</sup> *Rethinking Poverty: Report on the World's Social Situation 2010*. Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: New York, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Makandiwe, Thandika. “The Political Economy of Privatisation in Africa.” In *From Adjustment to Development in Africa: Conflict, Controversy and Consensus?* Edited by Giovanni Andrea Cornea and Gerald K. Helleiner. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Gandhi, M.K. *Young India*. 15 November 1928, 381.

**Section Two** presents some illustrations of the uneven progress in implementing the BPfA, noting that much of recent “progress” is built on forms of development that are environmentally and socially unsustainable, and generate inequality.<sup>13</sup>

**Section Three** discusses the challenges and opportunities facing feminism and women’s movements, in their quest for a better, more equal world.

**Section Four** sets out some ideas on economic policies that would support a more equal, just, peaceful and democratic world, in which there is full realization of the BPfA for all women and men.

## **Section 1: The Crises of Contemporary Development**

What the world economy has experienced in the last two years is not just a global downturn in growth of GDP. It is a set of linked crises, some dimensions of which, relating to food and fuel crisis and climate change, predate the financial crisis that erupted in September 2008. These crises are at root the outcome of economic ideas, policies and measures of progress which shifted the goals of national and international development from improvements in human wellbeing to increases in profits.<sup>14</sup>

*A central feature in the crisis and therefore key to its long term resolution is the growth of inequality within and between countries. One window into this problem is to consider the gap between wage and productivity growth. Productivity grew in most countries over the last three decades, and this should have led to rising wages and incomes. But instead, the share of national income going to workers has been falling in the United States, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. The flip side of this trend is that profits have been rising, and inequality widening. A second aspect of this problem relates to the rise in the share of income going to profits on financial activities and interest payments. In part, the widespread adoption of inflation targeting (the use of monetary policy to keep inflation low and close to zero) by central banks facilitated the rise of income going to wealth holders. High interest rates and low inflation raised the real rate of return on their financial investments.*<sup>15</sup>

Although the neo-liberal era, beginning in the early 80s, generated an enormous capacity to increase production for private consumption, it also deepened human suffering and exclusion for many. As the ILO has pointed out, the share of wages in gross national product decreased during this period practically in all countries.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Seguino, Stephanie. “The Way Forward in the Wake of the 2008 Global Economic Crisis: Does the Stiglitz Commission Report go Far Enough?” Paper presented at the *DAWN Development Debates*, January 18-20, 2010, Port-a-Piment, Mauritius.

<sup>14</sup> Seguino, Stephanie. “The Global Economic Crisis, its Gender Implications and Policy Responses.” Paper prepared for the interactive expert panel on the *Gender Perspectives of the Financial Crisis* at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations, New York, 2-13 March 2009, p10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *World of Work Report 2008: Income Inequalities in the Age of Financial Globalization*. International Institute of Labour Studies, International Labour Office, Geneva: 2008.

As noted by a former Reserve Bank of India Governor, there was excessive ‘financialisation’ of economies:

*The financial sector has grown more rapidly than other goods and services. In a way, that made growth of finance an end in itself and not a means to meet human needs such as food, fuel, health and education. Excessive financialisation often resulted in a redistribution of wealth in favour of a few, leading to a widening of inequalities... The excess inequalities have led to less stable aggregate demand. Excessive financialisation was also accompanied by multiplication of transactions, excessive leverage and excessive risk taking. High leverage simply means doing business with more of others’ than one’s own money. Excess risk taking happens when individuals or institutions have a perception that they get a share of gains but need not share in the losses; particularly if their remuneration depends on short-term profits.<sup>17</sup>*

As argued by the chair of the UK Financial Services Authority, there was too much banking, particularly in the centres of global finance in the rich countries, that was “socially useless”.<sup>18</sup>

The financial crisis grabbed all the headlines in the fourth quarter of 2008, when banks in USA and many countries in Europe were on the brink of failure. Those banks cutback on lending to households and businesses, and the effect was rapidly felt in falling production, consumption and employment. The impact was transmitted to the many developing countries via falling demand for their exports and falling inflows of finance, including migrants’ remittances. The financial crisis became a livelihoods crisis: unemployment rose and earnings stagnated or fell around the world – and impacts were of course, unequal.<sup>19</sup> Countries that had not fully liberalized their banking systems and retained some capability to steer finance in socially useful directions fared better than those that had fully liberalized their banking systems and left the distribution of credit to market forces.

The financial crisis occurred on top of a deep-seated resources crisis. Changes in land use as a response to the combined pressures of urbanization, environmental degradation, competition for water resources and use of land for bio-fuels and industrial production, led to shortfalls in food grain production<sup>20</sup> and significant rises in food prices in many countries in the period just prior to the financial crisis. Global food prices rose 55 percent from June 2007 to February 2008.<sup>21</sup> The speed of the increase in prices has temporarily abated in some countries but in other countries a

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<sup>17</sup> Reddy, YV. “Life After the Global Financial Crisis.” The S. Ranganathan Memorial Lecture delivered by the Former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India at the India International Centre, New Delhi, 30 Nov 2009.

<sup>18</sup> “Financial Services Authority chairman backs tax on 'socially useless' banks.” *The Guardian*, 27 August 2009. Accessed on 30 January 2010 and available at [www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/aug/27/fsa-bonus-city-banks-tax](http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/aug/27/fsa-bonus-city-banks-tax).

<sup>19</sup> Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko. “The Human Impact of the Global Economic Crisis: Gender and Human Rights.” Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>20</sup> *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, FAO 2009.; Parry, M. *et al*, “Climate Change and Hunger: Responding to the Challenge. World Food Programme, the International Food Policy Research Institute, the New York University Center on International Cooperation, the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London, and the Walker Institute, University of Reading (United Kingdom), November 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Press Conference by World Food Programme Executive Director on Food Price Crisis. UN Department of Public Information, News and Media Division, New York. April 24 2008.

continuing rise in the price of food has been sustained by devaluation. Even in the countries where prices have stabilized, food prices will rise again if growth resumes without any accompanying structural change. This is already happening in some countries, such as India.<sup>22</sup>

In the same period that food prices were rising so rapidly, oil prices experienced unprecedented volatility, with serious consequences for models of development built around high levels of petroleum consumption. Oil is a non-renewable resource and the point at which the availability of oil begins to decline ('peak oil') may not be far off. Underlying the resource crisis is the slower acting, but potentially even more damaging process of climate change, linked to carbon-intensive patterns of production and consumption that have been developed first in the rich world, and then in many parts of the developing world, in the name of 'progress' and 'modernity.'<sup>23</sup>

Also pre-dating the financial crisis is an emerging crisis of care, linked to the aging of the population in rich and middle income countries, and to health emergencies in some poorer countries. There are rising demands for unpaid care work from families, communities and volunteer groups, occurring at the same time as rising demands for women, who have typically provided most of the unpaid work, to do more paid as well as unpaid work. With the increase in women's labor force participation and the feminization of the labor force (i.e. an increase in women's share of employment), the tensions around balancing unpaid care work and labor market work have been rising in many countries. In rich countries, middle and upper class households have often responded by employing migrant women, thus transferring the squeeze on time for care to poorer households in poorer communities and countries.<sup>24</sup> In middle income countries, such as those in Latin America, declining fertility rates and the feminization of emigration are already beginning to generate similar problems. Employing a paid domestic worker seems a "solution" from the point of view of women juggling with the demands of a paid job and unpaid care responsibilities, but paid domestic workers typically face very low wages, have no social protection and too many (especially those that live in) are exploited through excessively long working hours, lack of privacy, and even sexual harassment.<sup>25</sup>

Implicated in all these crises is a crisis of values: neo-liberal development has produced a consumerist society, in which the worth of people and of natural resources is understood largely in financial terms. The obscene bonuses earned by some (predominantly male) bankers and financial dealers, and the rampant destruction of the environment, are the most egregious example of the inversion of values that has occurred.

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<sup>22</sup> "Food Prices Rise at Fastest Pace in 11 Years." *Mint*, 11 December 2009. Accessed on January 31 2010 and available at [www.livemint.com/2009/12/10122741/Food-prices-rise-at-fastest-pa.html](http://www.livemint.com/2009/12/10122741/Food-prices-rise-at-fastest-pa.html).

<sup>23</sup> Castaneda, Camey Itza and Gammage, Sarah. "Gender Dimensions and Global Crisis in a Context of Climate Change." Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>24</sup> Beneria, Lourdes. "Globalization, Labor and Women's Work: Critical Challenges for a Post-Liberal World." Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>25</sup> *Gender, Remittances and Development: Feminisation of Migration*. United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) 2007.

## **‘We told you so’**

The onset of the financial crisis may have come as a surprise to the mainstream economists who celebrated the supposed efficiency of neo-liberalism. But warnings of the deep flaws in neo-liberal capitalism had already been voiced by a variety of sources: social justice organizations; participants in the World Social Forums; organizations fighting for women’s rights; and equality-oriented economists, including feminists, Keynesians, structuralists, Marxists and others, inside academic institutions, UN organizations, and civil society organizations. The United Nations system had for some years, in various publications, such as *World Economic Situation and Prospects*<sup>26</sup> and *Trade and Development Report*,<sup>27</sup> drawn attention to the precarious state of the world economy, warning of unsustainable global financial imbalances. Critiques and warnings of the dangers and instabilities of neoliberalism could be found on the websites of organizations such as IDEAS, the International Working Group on Gender, Macroeconomics and The International Economics Network.<sup>28</sup> More recently, the UN report on the World Social Situation<sup>29</sup> further draws attention to the dangers of the path followed by powerful decision-making groups – not only in how they measured wellbeing and poverty, but also the strategies they chose to achieve economic prosperity. It says:

*It is time to rethink the way we understand poverty, how it is measured, and the policies used to address it. A more comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty, that puts decent jobs at the centre of development strategies, is needed to improve the lives of current and future generations.*<sup>30</sup>

## **The Impacts of the Crises on Women and Men, Girls and Boys**

The financial, food and fuel crises are expressed in diverse ways in different countries and for different groups of people. But there are some similarities in the experience of many low and middle-income groups of women because of their unequal and disadvantaged position, in the labour market, in production, in the home, and in public decision-making.

The impact on paid work in formal jobs in the public and private sectors is the most visible impact of the falling demand that followed the financial crisis. Whether women lose more jobs than men depends on the structure of the economy. If demand falls for products that are typically produced by a mainly female labour force (such as garments) women will lose more jobs than do men (as happened in Cambodia, and is now happening in many Asian and African countries<sup>31</sup>); if for products that are typically produced by a mainly male labour force (such as minerals), men

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<sup>26</sup> *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2006, 2007 and 2008*, published by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the five United Nations regional commissions: 2006, 2007 and 2008

<sup>27</sup> *Trade and Development Report 2007 and 2008*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2007 and 2008

<sup>28</sup> <http://ideas.repec.org>, [www.genderandmacro.org.com](http://www.genderandmacro.org.com), [www.internationaleconomics.net](http://www.internationaleconomics.net)

<sup>29</sup> *Rethinking Poverty: Report on the World’s Social Situation 2010*. UN DESA, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Sirimanne, Shamika. Written statement submitted to the Interactive Expert Panel of the Commission on the Status of Women, 53rd session on the *Emerging Issue: The Gender Perspectives of the Financial Crisis*, 2-13 March 2009: New York. Available and last accessed on 10 Nov 2009 at [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw53/panels/financial\\_crisis/Sirimanne.formatted.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw53/panels/financial_crisis/Sirimanne.formatted.pdf)

will lose more jobs than women (as has happened in Zambia). Even here there can be exceptions to the rule. For instance, the construction sector has been hit in many countries, and this most often leads to loss of jobs for men, but in some countries, such as India, many women are employed in the construction sector. A further factor is whether job loss occurs primarily in the private or the public sector. In some countries, the public sector employs relatively more women than men, whereas the private sector employs relatively more men than women. If the private sector is affected more rapidly than the public sector, as has been the case in many countries, then men's employment will be relatively more at risk; but women's employment will be more at risk in the medium term, if the crisis begins to affect the public finances and lead to expenditure cutbacks. The first round of job losses by both women and men will spill over to impact other forms of formal employment, informal employment and unpaid work in households and communities.

The impact on informal employment is not readily visible. This is not captured by regular employment surveys, and has only been revealed by special studies<sup>32</sup> often those conducted in a participatory way by women researchers working with women at the grassroots. Ranjanben Parmar, a member of SEWA, an NGO that works with poor working women in India cries, "*Who sent this recession? Why did they send it?*" She makes her living collecting scrap along with her small daughter. But the crash in prices has transformed her life: the price of waste (such as waste steel, soft plastic, newspapers and dry bones) in Ahmedabad has fallen by 60 percent. As she is now unable to pay the fees and other expenses for her children's education, they have been taken out of school and are now involved in waste collection as well as other income earning activities.<sup>33</sup>

Her experience and that of her children is likely to be shared by many poor women and children throughout the world. The distributional impacts of recessions are typically highly unequal; and loss of jobs and earnings may be compounded by cuts in public expenditure introduced in misguided attempts to rapidly rebalance the government's budget. For example, studies of the 1997 East Asian financial crisis show a rapid rise in poverty and worsening of health and education indicators due to both falling incomes and reduced services.<sup>34</sup> In Indonesia, UNICEF studies found a sharp reduction in the use of public health services by people who could not afford the fees or found that services began to run out of essential supplies such as drugs.<sup>35</sup>

Women tend to face more disadvantages than men when they lose their jobs. Women tend to have less access than men to unemployment insurance, where it exists, as well as to retraining opportunities. They are more likely than men to disappear from the statistics on unemployment.

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<sup>32</sup> "Women and Men in the Informal Economy: Key Facts and New MDG3 Indicators." Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO) Network, Realizing Rights and Self-Employed Women's Association publication, accessed on 31 January 2010 and available at [www.wiego.org/publications/Women-Men-in-Informal-Employment.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/publications/Women-Men-in-Informal-Employment.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Jhabvala, Renana. "Paper on Financial Crisis Based on the Experiences of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)" presented at a consultation on the Gender Dimension of the Economic Crisis between the Committee of Feminist Economists and the members of the Planning Commission of India, 28 Apr 2009: Delhi

<sup>34</sup> Sirimanne, Shamika. 53rd CSW, *The Gender Perspectives of the Financial Crisis*, March 2009. p 4.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF Background Paper on Key Facts on the Nature and Size of the Crisis, accessed on 31 January 2010 and available at [www.unicef.org/voy/media/BACKGROUNDER%281%29.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/voy/media/BACKGROUNDER%281%29.pdf).

They are more likely than men to have to seek low paid, precarious work in the informal economy, in which women are already disproportionately employed.

Indeed, many women who did not undertake paid work before the crisis are likely to be seeking work in the informal economy to try to compensate for their husband's loss of employment in the formal economy. The result is all too often enforced idleness for men (who have lost their jobs) and overwork for women, who add paid informal work to their unpaid work in the home.

But the informal economy does not offer an adequate alternative for women. It is not immune to the effects of the financial crisis. To reveal this, special studies are usually needed, because regular labour market and industrial statistics often fail to cover the informal economy. For example, a Commission set up by the Government of India (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector) reports that the impact of the crisis has not been restricted to the formal economy, and has indeed been more serious in the informal economy. Moreover, the informal workers gained little even when the Indian economy grew rapidly.<sup>36</sup>

During the period of rapid growth in India (1993/94-2004/05), consumption expanded rapidly in richest 20 percent of households but the benefits of growth bypassed the vast majority of the population who work in the informal economy. The NCEUS report found that the reluctance of banks to lend to the informal economy has been reinforced by the financial crisis.<sup>37</sup> There is less demand for the products that the poorest of informal workers produce, leading to lower earnings and harmful effects on informal workers and their children.<sup>38</sup>

Even less visible than the impact of the economic crisis on the informal economy is the impact on the unpaid economy, where households are provisioned through non-market work (growing food in a kitchen garden, collecting firewood and water, sewing and knitting clothes for the family, building and maintaining a home for the family); and in which people take care of their family and friends for free. Though men and boys do contribute to the unpaid economy, the bulk of the work is done by women and girls. The rising contribution of women to the paid economy has not been matched by a rising contribution of men to the unpaid economy. Even before the emergence of the crises of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the total working day of poor women and girls was higher than that of men and boys.<sup>39</sup> These crises are likely to lengthen that day and intensify that work, taking a toll on the health of women and girls, and the education of girls, a toll that may be irreversible, even if the economy resumes growth. Based on previous experience, poor women and girls are likely to be assigned the role of trying to cushion their families against the crisis, making do and mending, to provide the safety net of last resort when all else fails. No country has the ability to track this at national level. Although more countries are now collecting time-use statistics, which reveal the extent of work in the unpaid economy, they do so only at long intervals – five years or so compared with the monthly or quarterly reports that many

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<sup>36</sup> NCEUS Report. "Report on Conditions of Work and Promotion of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector." New Delhi: Dolphin Printo, 2007. The NCEUS was set up as an advisory body and watchdog for the informal sector as a part of the Ministry of Small Scale Industries, Government of India.

<sup>37</sup> Devaki Jain, Economic Crisis and Women: A Draft Review of Selected Sources of Knowledge, *Mainstream*, Vol XLVII No 27, New Delhi, 2009

<sup>38</sup> "Women and Men in the Informal Economy: Key Facts and New MDG3 Indicators." WIEGO Network.

<sup>39</sup> Elson, Diane. *Progress of the World's Women*, UNIFEM 2000; Jain, Devaki: "Valuing Work: Time as a Measure" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXI, No. 43, October 25, 1996;

countries produce on paid work. The hidden costs of the burdens placed on the unpaid economy only come to light through special studies, often participatory studies conducted by feminist researchers with low income women. It takes women's experiential knowledge of the economy to bring these costs into public view and to identify policies to mitigate them, as will be discussed further in section 3.

Prior to the onset of the financial crisis, women and men in many countries were already hit by the rises in food and oil prices, and by climate change. Here too there are gender differentiated impacts. It is usually women who have the responsibility for feeding their families, buying food and preparing meals. Rapid increases in food prices put enormous strain on the budgets of low income women, who often go without food themselves as they try to protect their children from malnutrition. Malnourishment among pregnant women and early childhood has irreversible impacts on the development of children's capacities.

The rise in oil prices has stimulated the production of bio-fuels. In some parts of the world, there are real concerns that women farmers may be displaced from lands to which they have customary rights in order to expand the production of bio-fuels inputs. For example, the Government of India, as part of its National Mission on Bio-fuels, aims to convert approximately 400,000 hectares of marginal lands for the cultivation of non-edible oil seed crops for bio diesel production. Further, large tracts of land and coast lines are being diverted from growing crops to house export zones and tourist resorts – a trend related to export-led growth.<sup>40</sup>

This potentially threatens the food availability as well as the livelihoods of women who depend on these lands for food, fodder, and fuel wood. Climate change also has gender-differentiated impacts. It is likely to increase the time women spend collecting water and firewood, as surface water dries up and forests wither, with rising temperatures. Diseases such as malaria and cholera (and other water-borne diseases) are likely to increase, adding to women's care responsibilities.<sup>41</sup> An adequate response to the financial and economic crisis needs to address these longer run problems, not just seek to restore financial stability and economic growth and employment.

### **Policy Responses to the Financial Crisis**

Responses of governments and international financial institutions to date may be summed up as bailouts and expansionary fiscal and monetary stimulus for some, neoliberal austerity for others, with little regard in either case for addressing the other dimensions of the crisis, including the safeguarding of women's rights. The aim is to stabilize the system, not redirect the system.

Some timid measures have been taken to strengthen international regulation of international banks and other financial institutions, but opportunities to fundamentally challenge their power, and to create socially useful banks, have not yet been taken. The objective has been to get things 'back to normal' as soon as possible, though what was 'normal' prior to the financial crisis is deeply questionable and decidedly unsustainable. Some voices are beginning to question this - a

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<sup>40</sup> Report of the Committee on Development of Bio-fuel, Planning Commission, Government of India. Accessed on 30 January 2010 and available at [http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/genrep/cmtt\\_bio.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/genrep/cmtt_bio.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Castaneda-Camey, Itza and Gammage, Sarah. "Gender Dimensions and Global Crisis in a Context of Climate Change." Rabat 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

former governor of the Reserve Bank of India said: “The exit cannot be to the old normalcy since it is proven to generate crisis.”<sup>42</sup>

Most rich countries, and many large middle income countries, tried to counteract the financial crisis measures by supporting the banking system, and by expanding demand through a stimulus package of a variety of monetary and fiscal measures. Investment in physical infrastructure, such as roads, has been an important part of the rescue packages in many countries. In most countries, this does not create jobs for women, though in some countries women are employed in construction. In fact, the construction industry is the second largest employer of women after agriculture in India. In China, women form 60-80 percent of the agricultural labor force among different provinces and shoulder the major responsibility for social reproduction including food security and unpaid care.<sup>43</sup> Almost everywhere, investment in social infrastructure, such as expanding education and health systems by employing more health workers and teachers, tends to create relatively more jobs for women.

Tax breaks and subsidies have tended to be directed only to formal larger scale enterprises (especially the car industry) while informal enterprises have had to rely on a ‘trickle down’ of demand that may be far too slow in reaching them. There has been growing attention to social protection and use of cash transfers, both conditional and unconditional, has been further extended. But while redistributive measures are welcome, they are not sufficient: attention also has to be paid to reshaping production and consumption systems to be more supportive of equality.

Of course, not all countries have been able to deploy a fiscal stimulus to counteract the crisis, and others which did are being urged to quickly introduce austerity programmes. The role of the IMF has been revived so that it can assist governments in countries with little fiscal space to cope with the crisis.<sup>44</sup> There is currently no alternative source of finance for governments of poor and middle income countries seeking a loan to tide them over the economic recession. The IMF claims that it has allowed many recipient governments more leeway in meeting the performance criteria that are attached to loans<sup>45</sup> but the price of a loan is still too often neo-liberal policy conditions, such as market liberalization and expenditure cuts, that tend to deepen the extent of loss of jobs and earnings.

### **Getting ‘Gender’ on to the ‘Crisis’ Agenda**

Women have already been strategizing about how to develop their knowledge of the gendered impacts of the crises and to get their organised voice heard in the response to crisis. Women were

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<sup>42</sup> Reddy, YV. “Life After the Global Financial Crisis.” The S. Ranganathan Memorial Lecture delivered by the Former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India at the India International Centre, New Delhi, 30 Nov 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Chen, Lanyan. “Equity in Post-Crisis China: A Feminist Political Economy Perspective.” Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>44</sup> Ghosh, Jayati. “IMF: Back from the Dead.” *Mint*, 23 Nov 2009, accessed on 30 January 2010 and available at [www.livemint.com/2009/11/23221431/IMF-back-from-the-dead.htm](http://www.livemint.com/2009/11/23221431/IMF-back-from-the-dead.htm).

<sup>45</sup> “IMF Support for Low-Income Countries” IMF Factsheet available at the website <http://www.imf.org/External/np/exr/facts/poor.htm> Fall, Yassine. “G20 IMF Bailout: What would the IFI Austerity Package Mean for Women’s Economic Security?”

not well-represented in social dialogue on the design of the response to the Asian financial crisis and they hope more attention will be paid this time round to gender issues.<sup>46</sup>

The UNDP Gender Team, UNIFEM, ILO and other UN agencies have begun to take up issues about women and the crisis. International networks, such as WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing), AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development), IAFFE (International Association for Feminist Economics), DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) and the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development have begun to investigate the gendered impact of the crises and to assess policy responses. There have been similar national and regional efforts, such as the conference on gender and the financial crisis held in Mexico in July 2009, with the support of the Mexican government and UN agencies. In India, the Planning Commission called the Committee of Feminist Economists for a consultation on the gender dimensions of the global and financial crisis.<sup>47</sup> In these various spaces, women have expressed concern that the policy responses, both national and international, may continue to support the failed policies and flawed governance system that has created the current crises.<sup>48</sup>

From the point of view of the Casablanca group, it will not be enough to focus on how women can get a fair share of jobs created by fiscal stimulus or how they can be protected by measures such as cash transfers. If post-crisis economies are to meet goals of equality and social justice and environmental sustainability, we need to consider more basic questions, such as questions about the role of markets in society<sup>49</sup>; and about what kinds of goods and services are being produced and for whom; and what criteria are going to be used to judge success and how we define progress. Women's organizations need to engage with "macro-finance" as well as with "micro-finance." Measures to end the crisis will fail if they simply seek to restore growth and greed.<sup>50</sup> The section that follows focuses more concretely on the ways in which the notion of "progress" has to be re-evaluated in view of the experiences that women have had of development.

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<sup>46</sup> Jain, Devaki. "Gendering the Macro-economic Sky." Paper presented at the *High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes*, 16-18 November 2009, Bangkok, p3.

<sup>47</sup> Consultation of the Committee of Feminist Economists on the Gender Dimensions of the Financial Crisis by the Planning Commission, 28 April 2008, Planning Commission Premises, New Delhi.

<sup>48</sup> "Time to Act: Women Cannot Wait. A call for rights-based responses to the global financial and economic crisis." Women's Working Group on Financing for Development, June 24 2009. Accessed on 30 January 2010 available at [www.dawnnet.org/uploads/File/WWG%20on%20FD\\_Doc%2015\\_WWG%20on%20FD%20Declaration%20at%20HLC\\_Jun%2009.pdf](http://www.dawnnet.org/uploads/File/WWG%20on%20FD_Doc%2015_WWG%20on%20FD%20Declaration%20at%20HLC_Jun%2009.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> Beneria, Lourdes. "Globalization, Labor and Women's Work: Critical Challenges for a Post-Liberal World."

<sup>50</sup> Elson, Diane. "Economics for a Post-Crisis World: Putting Social Justice First." Rabat 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

## Section 2

### Some Illustrations of Progress and Setbacks

In our view *real* “progress” is not synonymous with “modernization”<sup>51</sup>; it does not mean catching up, in a linear fashion, with a way of life patterned on the Western experience of development, defined principally in terms of increase in the quantity and range of products for private consumption, for those able to afford them. Societies that have caught up in terms of GDP per capita, such as Japan, have often failed to move at an equal pace on issues of women's empowerment. For example, women's inclusion in public decision-making bodies in Japan remains extremely low<sup>52</sup> and in contrast to countries with much lower per capita income such as women in South Asia. As women in developed countries have gained more income and more access to markets, they have come under mounting pressures to make consumer objects of themselves, a process often lauded as free choice and as indicating greater autonomy<sup>53</sup> We believe it is necessary to scrutinize the claims of “progress” and ask whether the kinds of “progress” we have seen since the signing of the Beijing Platform for Action have brought about more equal and just societies, in which all women have enjoyed an advance in truly *human* development, and have secured greater realization of their human rights. In our view, the quest for economic justice is seeking the path towards change, towards an economic system where people have a certain level of security, at least of their basic needs, where work is fulfilling and not back-breaking and exploitative and where people feel a sense of community and empowerment.<sup>54</sup>

#### Progress in Education and Employment: Uneven, Limited or Insecure

The educational levels of girls have improved in almost all parts of the world, but we question what kinds of education. Too often girls are trained to fit the world as it is rather than educated to challenge and reshape it.<sup>55</sup>

Women are in the labor market in greater numbers in almost all countries. Women made up 40.5 per cent of the global labour force in 2008, up from 39.9 per cent in 1999.<sup>56</sup> The fact that there are more women in paid work the world over is widely celebrated as progress, but we must not forget that unpaid work, provisioning and caring for families is not valued economically and still remains mainly the responsibility of women. Moreover gender wage gaps persist even in rich

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<sup>51</sup> Emmerji, Louis. Paper prepared for the North-South Round Table on Imperatives of Tolerance and Justice in a Globalised World, 26-27 November 2002, Cairo.

<sup>52</sup> Hara, Hiroko. “Modernity, Technology, and the Progress of Women: Challenges and Prospects.” Rabat 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>53</sup> Elson, Diane. “Economics for a Post-Crisis World: Putting Social Justice First.”

<sup>54</sup> Jhabvala, Renana. “Poor Women Organising Themselves for Economic Justice.” Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>55</sup> McFadden, Patricia. “Interrogating and Rebuilding Progress through Feminist Knowledge: Challenges for African Feminism.” Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>56</sup> *Global Employment Trends for Women: March 2009*. International Labour Office, Geneva: ILO, 2009. p9.

countries such as the US and Japan, where women are at least as well educated as men. Nowhere do women get the same financial return to their education as men.

At the same time as more women are entering paid work, working conditions are deteriorating in many industries and in many parts of the world.<sup>57</sup> Women's jobs are often insecure: at the global level, the share of vulnerable employment in total female employment was 52.7 per cent in 2007 (49.1 per cent for men), and this may even increase to an estimated 54.7 per cent (51.8 per cent for men) in 2009 in the worst-case scenario of the current global economic crisis.<sup>58</sup> Paid work is often celebrated as the key route to empowerment and equality, but this ignores the realities of precariousness, and poverty, associated with much informal employment.<sup>59</sup> Only a minority of women enjoy decent work. The opportunity for flexible work may suggest greater freedom for women in combining paid work with commitments to unpaid work (especially to caring for others). But we must always ask what kind of flexibility and on whose terms? It may be of more benefit to middle-class professional women than to low income women, for whom flexibility in terms of hours of work may come at the expense of a decent wage and working conditions.

While it is true that some women have benefited from the expanding markets and opportunities, many have been left out, and some have lost land and other assets and have been pushed further into poverty and deprivation. The setting up of Special Export Zones (SEZ) and other similar arrangements in many developing countries has opened up job options for women producing for export, and in many countries women workers are the majority in these Zones. However they are often hired on a casual, temporary basis and lack social protection. The SEZs, and other types of industrial parks, have often been set up at the expenses of rural people whose land has been seized, jeopardizing their livelihoods and culture. Women in these areas have had to cope with fewer resources as well as trying to hold their families together in a context of social violence.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Continuing Challenge of Unpaid Work**

It has been much harder to get more men into unpaid work than more women into paid work. Even in a country like Cuba, which rejected the western model of consumerist development, women have borne a much greater burden of unpaid work than men. Cuba can point to tremendous achievements in areas of education, health, and gender equality legislation. However the incorporation of greater numbers of women into the labor force took place without recasting gender stereotyping, so much that there was no provision for an improvement in housing or reduction in household drudgery through appliances like washing machines and fridges. There has been a lack of adequate day-care centres for children of working parents. A continuation of patriarchal ideology has deterred men from participating in housework and child care. All this

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<sup>57</sup> Otobe, Naoko. "Gender Dimensions of the World of Work in a Globalized Economy." Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>58</sup> *Global Employment Trends for Women: March 2009*. ILO, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Beneria, Lourdes. "Globalization, Labor and Women's Work: Critical Challenges for a Post-Liberal World." Rabat 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Jain, D and Chacko, S. "Linkages between Economic Growth and Equitable Development - Lessons from India." Rabat 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

meant that during the crisis of 1989-90, the burden of survival under straitened circumstances took an additional toll on women.<sup>61</sup>

All over the world, policy makers still fail to take account of unpaid work, despite the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action calling for measurement of the unpaid economy on the same principles as used in the System of National Accounting to measure the paid economy. Some attempts were made to do this, but they were not sustained. An example is the Philippines, where in 1997 the National Statistical Coordination Board counted unpaid labor and valued it at the wage paid to janitors. They found that with the inclusion of unpaid household services, GDP would increase by 27-40 per cent over a nine-year period, showing how significant this work is. Yet in spite of all the methodological and conceptual advances made both in time-use surveys and valuation processes, this work was not continued; and unpaid work today is not integrated into the national accounts.<sup>62</sup>

As well as unpaid work in the home, women also do unpaid work as “volunteers” for the public sector. Many public services, such as child care, early years’ education and care of those living with HIV/AIDS rely on poor women who are recruited as community workers, “peer educators”, health promoters, etc.<sup>63</sup>

### **Progress in Decision-making: Presence does not mean Power**

There has been an increase in many countries in the numbers of women elected representatives in local and national legislatures, often brought about by special measures such as quotas. A recent example is Nepal where, since 2007, one-third of seats are reserved for women. But we must recognize the limits to the powers of legislatures, which are constrained, especially in poor countries, by international financial institutions and international capital markets. Organizations whose operations and power are global in nature often cannot be tamed or made accountable by local or national level action. Therefore as important as local and national struggles are, a note of caution needs to be sounded. Local and national struggles have to be linked to international fora.<sup>64</sup> We need new forms of international governance that support the decentralization of economic *power*, not just of responsibility.<sup>65</sup> Further in lowering the political administration entities, economic entities also need decentralization. Economic power has been too peaked, and needs decongestion of the wires.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Nunez Sarmiento, Marta. “Cuban Development Alternatives to Market-Driven Economies: A Gendered Case Study on Women’s Employment.” Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>62</sup> Monsod, Solita Collas. “Removing the Cloak of Invisibility: Integrating Unpaid Household Services in the Nation’s Economic Accounts.” Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>63</sup> Razavi, S. “The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context: Contextual Issues, Research Questions, and Policy Options.” Programme on Gender and Development, Paper No. 3. UNRISD, Geneva, 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Renana Jhabvala “Poor Women Organising Themselves for Economic Justice.”

<sup>65</sup> Jain, Devaki. “Decongesting Economic Power.” *Mint*, 11 May 2009; Goetze, A and Jenkins, R. “Democracy Assistance and Gender Equality” for OpenDemocracy on UNDEF (United Nations Democracy Fund).

<sup>66</sup> Jain, Devaki. “Rethinking Gender, Democracy and Development: Is Decentralisation a Tool for Local Effective Political Voice?” Ferrara University and Modena University, 20-22 May 2002, Italy; See website of the International Development Research Centre for examples of this.

## **Reversals in Progress**

In some regions there have been reversals in some achievements. Life expectancy has fallen in the former Soviet Union and large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Women in former centrally planned economies have lost access to state-provided child care. In parts of Africa, as health delivery systems crumble, diseases which had been almost eradicated have come back, while new diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, also add to household care burdens. In these circumstances, as family resources dwindle, quite often the girl child is the first to be withdrawn from school.<sup>67</sup>

## **Unsustainable Progress**

There have been increases in economic growth and reductions in the proportion of the population living in absolute poverty in many parts of the world. But this “progress” is not sustainable. It is environmentally unsustainable: Women in forest areas depend on gathering food products that are progressively disappearing because of excessive tropical mining and logging and the planting of rapid growth monoculture plants. Deforestation has accelerated at alarming rates. About 130,000 square kilometers of forest are lost every year.<sup>68</sup> It is socially unsustainable: violence, wars, deprivation, unemployment and inequality are conducive to the construction of collectivities around narrow and exclusive identities.

## **Revisiting the Idea of Progress**

The agenda of progressive women needs to change from merely seeking to be mainstreamed in the kinds of development that have been taking place over the period since the BPfA.<sup>69</sup> The goal has to be to reshape development paradigms, based on women’s deep knowledge of the challenges of everyday life, of getting a living and caring for a family.

## **Section 3**

### **Sites and Forms of Feminist Resistance**

The 2010 CSW provides a moment to reflect on the development of feminist politics and women’s movements. The underlying notion embodied by all feminist struggles has been the struggle for freedom, but not just for women.<sup>70</sup> Solidarity has also been a central part of the feminist politics, and women’s movements have worked in conjunction with a raft of other movements, for example the human rights, gay rights, environmental sustainability, social justice and peace movements. These partnerships were essential for transforming and extending the terrain of rights. In the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), feminists

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<sup>67</sup> Chigudu, Hope. “Women’s Movements in Post-Colonial Africa: Reversals to Progress for Women in Africa?”

<sup>68</sup> Fall, Yassine. “Paying the Price: The Cost of the Commoditization of Food and Water for Women.”

<sup>69</sup> Chigudu, Hope. “Women’s Movements in Post-Colonial Africa: Reversals to Progress for Women in Africa?”

<sup>70</sup> Jain, D and Chacko, S. “Walking Together: the Journey of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Women’s Movement.” *Development in Practice*, Volume 19 Issue 7, 895.

underlined the role of excessive consumption in environmental degradation and highlighted the role of women as managers of natural resources. In the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993), women's rights activists expanded the notion of rights to encompass women's rights as human rights. At the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994), they had the world acknowledge that women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential for just development; and in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), women successfully strategized to get their governments to adopt a far reaching platform for action.

The UN has been a strategic and enabling space and opportunity for the advancement of women's rights in the global context; and has provided an ideological and policy bridge between women's movements and their regional and national government apparatuses. However, in the eyes of the women's movements, the backlash on women's sexual and reproductive rights, and deepening inequalities and multiple crises have also revealed the limitations of the UN as a site to further advance women's rights. They argue that, the rich agenda of the BPfA and other UN conferences of the 1990s, which encompassed a vision of a more equal and just world, in which economic and social as well as civil and political rights would be realized, has been watered down to the MDGs, which have a more minimalist agenda: reduction of extreme poverty, and improvement in health and education.. In response to this criticism, the UN development agencies have adopted a strategy of linking the BPfA with the MDGs agenda. For example, the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women will focus on linking the Beijing Platform for Action with the MDG agenda.

Women find themselves in an increasingly dangerous world as conflicts threaten and decimate their livelihoods, and fundamentalists of diverse political orientations unleash ruthless dictates that confine their bodies and deny them their most fundamental rights and freedoms. In each of our economic and social locations as feminist activists and scholars, who participate in the crafting and dissemination of transformative knowledge, we are confronted with the consequences of economic and social inequality in ways that are deepening and expanding with such rapidity that our abilities to respond in credible and sustainable ways have come under severe pressure.<sup>71</sup> This contemporary moment therefore demands new visions, strategies and modes of struggle. Generally in the South, including in the former colonies after liberation from colonialism, governments have been dominated and controlled by ruling elites. In the North governments have become more and more subject to the influence of powerful corporations and banks. Feminists must acknowledge the limitations of nationalism and work to craft new relationships with the state in order to transform it, so that it becomes a protector and guarantor of rights.

Another challenge arising out of the contemporary moment is linked to the relationships that women's organizations have established with national government, UN and other donor agencies which have lead to the increasing professionalization of women's political agendas. In many cases this has locked women's aspirations into narrow agendas that are focused mainly on service provision. This has led to a disjuncture between some women's movements and other

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<sup>71</sup> McFadden, Pat. "Interrogating and Rebuilding Progress through Feminist Knowledge: Challenges for African Feminism."

more radical social justice movements. Women's rights advocates have to resolve the tensions generated by what may be well-intended efforts to advance women's rights through gender mainstreaming but which have often inadvertently served to hijack the women's movements more radical demands. We are concerned that women's movements and efforts to achieve women's empowerment are increasingly being high-jacked by 'safe' gender programmes that neither challenge the status quo nor consolidate the gains made by women, reducing gender struggles to a management project and gender training to the transmission of a bundle of techniques and tools of analysis.<sup>72</sup>

Alliances with the burgeoning progressive masculinity movements offer new opportunities for the feminist movement. Such alliances could begin to unsettle existing gender hierarchies and facilitate the redefinition of intimate relationships and domestic arrangements. They also offer the possibility of reaching and connecting with new constituencies on vital issues they currently address such as violence against women, HIV AIDS and reproductive rights, as well as more equal sharing of domestic tasks. Much of the work of women on issues of gender equality and gender justice got waylaid due to the backlash on issues of sexual and reproductive health, which absorbed disproportionate energies of feminist organizing efforts all over the globe. If men's movements take on some of these burdens, it leaves women's movements space to refocus some of their energies without giving up the important work they have initiated. Feminists still need to work, as they have in the past, on violence against women; but also to move beyond issues of domestic and sexual violence, now being taken up by men's movements, to challenge systemic violence (such as that linked to militarism); and then have men partner with them in that effort too. In other words, feminists must continue to be trailblazers in the struggle for gender justice, while building alliances with progressive men, who seek to transform dominant understandings and practices of masculinity.<sup>73</sup>

New opportunities are also provided by the internet and cyber space, including a vibrant contemporary site for the democratization of ideas and strategies between and among women's organizations. This also enables young feminists to level the playing field as they insert their specific perspectives and ideas on feminism through the use of new media technologies. Virtual communications and interactions provide new sites for the documentation and archiving of feminist knowledge and experiences: see for instance the website of the Casablanca dreamers.<sup>74</sup> In addition, these communication technologies can play a vital role in transforming markets, making them sites of solidarity, co-operation and mutual respect, in which producers and users of goods and services can interact without the mediation of large profit-seeking corporations. An example is the role played by the internet in giving Moroccan women of the High Atlas village of Ait-Iktel the capacity to sell their carpets to people all over the world. In addition, the internet can provide access to knowledge of alternative ways of life. In Morocco, young people who were

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<sup>72</sup> Chigudu, Hope. "Women's Movements in Post-Colonial Africa: Reversals to Progress for Women in Africa?"

<sup>73</sup> Silliman, Jael. "Progressive Masculinities: Oxymoron or Achievable?" Rabat, 2008. Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>74</sup> Website: [www.casablanca-dream.net](http://www.casablanca-dream.net).

overwhelmed by consumerist western lifestyles, finding, through the web, alternatives in the Sufi philosophers like Ibn Hazm, emphasize altruistic love, and the care of others.<sup>75</sup>

## Section 4

### Towards Equitable, Just and Sustainable Development

The key message of the paper is the need to redefine and reconstruct development in more just, equitable, and sustainable ways, if the BPFA is to be fully implemented for all women. Such an economy will not be achieved by restoring the types of growth that occurred before the financial and economic crisis. It requires new growth paths that are equitable (in terms of class, race/ethnicity, caste, and region) and sustainable (in terms of contributing to the conservation of natural resources rather than their degradation; and in combating climate change by reducing harmful emissions).

In thinking about this, it is helpful to bear in mind the advice of Gandhi:

*'Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man/woman whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him...'*<sup>76</sup>

But instead of seeing poor men and women as a “target group” within an unequal economy, in need of special measures to lift them out of absolute poverty, Gandhi argued that they must, together with the mass of the people, have real economic power and thus be able to create the kind of development that meets their needs in sustainable ways. This we would call economic democracy. During the neo-liberal era we have witnessed the enhancement of political democracy in many countries, but it has not been accompanied by economic democracy.

#### Growth that “bubbles up” rather than “trickles down”

In the kind of economy we envisage, economic growth would “bubble up” from the labour, products and services of the low and middle income people, rather than “trickle down” from the capital from narrow spaces of the economy to be redistributed.<sup>77</sup> If growth were led by wages, and the earnings of small and medium farmers, and small and medium businesses, and the self employed, rather than by the high-income professionals, it would lead to an economy in which growth “bubbles up” and rebalance the structure of production, both in terms of the types of goods produced, the types of organizations that produce them, and the way that they are distributed. It requires ensuring that income is earned through “decent work” which provides enough income for an adequate standard of living, and respect for worker’s rights. Mere jobs are not enough. Pro-poor growth is all too often defined in terms of enabling poor people to work in production that creates profits for rich people, without any demand for fair shares. The bedrock of fair shares has to be fair earnings and a pattern of output geared to meeting the needs of low and middle income people.

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<sup>75</sup> Mernissi, Fatema. *Digital Scheherazade: The Rise of Women as Key Players in the Arab Gulf Communication Strategies*. Rabat, 2005.

<sup>76</sup> Jain, Devaki. “Morals in Politics – The Gandhian Touch.” *Man In India*, 89 (4) : 543-555, 551.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

A new approach to agriculture and the food economy must be at the heart of new growth strategies to ensure freedom from hunger. The neoliberal approach to the production and distribution of food has failed. The liberalization of international trade in food, and the privatization of agricultural marketing and distribution of agricultural inputs, has jeopardized the livelihoods of poorer and smaller farmers, promoted expansion of large scale commercial agriculture and enhanced the power of international agribusiness corporations.<sup>78</sup> It has not delivered food security. It has not delivered healthy food—food corporations produce low priced but fatty, sugary, salty food leading to obesity and diseases such as diabetes.

In many developing countries, women make up over half of the agricultural work force. In some countries they are the majority of farmers. Women farmers are particularly active in food production, but all too often they are not recognized as farmers in their own right, and have been denied secure land rights and access to training and productive inputs, and to stable markets with fair prices. The distribution of land rights, and of public investment and regulation of markets (including international markets) needs to be re-oriented to support women farmers to enable them to improve the productivity of their land and labour. It will not be enough simply to distribute more land to individual women farmers. Without a complete re-orientation of agricultural policy, women farmers will be vulnerable to indebtedness and may end up having to sell their land. In the space of a couple of decades, land would be concentrated in the hands of large commercial farmers. Better land rights for women need to be embedded in a system of equitable public support.

Industry and manufacturing need to be re-oriented to focus less on the production of fashionable goods (with built in obsolescence) for individualised, competitive private consumption; and more on good quality, long lasting goods, affordable by all, and designed to meet needs rather than advertising-induced wants. The focus on the private car as the lynch pin both of the transport system and of people's aspirations for a better life needs to be questioned. Individualized transport systems built around the privately owned car are a significant contributor to climate change; and to the fuel crisis. Moreover they exclude those who cannot afford cars (even so-called cheap ones) – and car ownership is much more prevalent among men than among women. In addition, such transport systems result in huge numbers of deaths and injuries each year. Good, flexible, democratically organized, safe public transport is much more supportive of a just economy. There are signs of new thinking in some places. Twenty years ago, Beijing had one of the world's best systems of bicycle lanes, and 4 of 5 people travelled around by bicycle. Then came the expansion of private car ownership, and with it appalling traffic congestion and pollution problems, an experience shared with many rapidly growing cities around the world. City planners in Beijing are now trying to bring back bicycles and improve public transport, including restored bicycle lanes, and bicycle parks near bus and subway stations. They are planning for half of the cities residents to travel to work by public transport in 5 years.<sup>79</sup>

The control of production and distribution of water and energy by large corporations also needs rethinking. Privatized production and distribution of clean water for profit risks excluding

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<sup>78</sup> Fall, Yassine. "Paying the Price: The Cost of the Commoditization of Food and Water for Women."

<sup>79</sup> "Campaign to Boost Cycling in Beijing." *The Guardian*, 24 January 2010, accessed on 30 January 2010 and available at [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/24/beijing-cycling-capital-plans](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/24/beijing-cycling-capital-plans).

remoter regions and poorer people from improved access to this vital resource. Corporations can make more profit by distributing to those who can pay more and are concentrated in urban centres. Public systems for water can be funded by taxation as well as by systems of user charges that provide a basic allocation of free water, and an escalating system of user charges, that increases the per unit charge for higher and higher levels of usage. In such a system the better-off contribute to affordable access by poorer people. Public funding can also support people with information, training and equipment to themselves become producers and distributors of water, harvesting water, and treating and reutilizing it.<sup>80</sup> Good, democratically organized, decentralized systems for water provision are more supportive of a just economy.

New growth paths must not just incorporate the market economy. They must have at their heart a concern with the unpaid economy. Work in the unpaid economy must be recognized and made visible through the collection of time use data on a regular and timely basis. The amount of unpaid work that has to be done must be reduced through public investment in infrastructure to provide fuel and water; and in social infrastructure, especially health services and care services for children, frail elderly people and people with disabilities. The remaining unpaid work must be redistributed so that men and boys contribute more, and enjoy the delights as well as the challenges of care work. Policies must be in place to ensure that employers recognize and support the domestic obligations of employees, for men as well as for women. Both women and men should be able to reconcile and balance, on an equal basis, their paid and unpaid work. Both women and men should be equally recognised as earners and as carers. We all need time free from unpaid work (especially the kinds that are drudgery), and also enough time to care for our families, friends and communities.

This means that a new growth path requires a different economy of time, in which people come to give a greater value to free time and less value to more and more commodities. Much of the growth we have seen in the last two hundred years has been based on pressuring people to work longer and longer hours to earn a living, at the expense of cultural expression and time for family, friends and communities.

The details of the growth path will, of course, vary from country to country but in each case, the control of money and banking, the determination of public expenditure and taxation, the operation of markets (including international markets), the enjoyment of rights to resources and to work, and the reasoning on which economic policy is based, would need to change. We can gain some ideas of the kinds of changes that are necessary from the practices and ideas developed by women in their struggles for freedom.

### **Socially useful banking and finance, at macro as well as micro levels**

We need to replace “socially useless” banking with “socially useful” banking. Women have a lot of experience with creation of small-scale self-organized savings and loan groups in their local neighbourhoods. There has also been an expansion of socially useful banking by organizations like the Grameen Bank; and women’s organizations like SEWA have created co-operative banks for their members. The emphasis on putting finance at the service of social goals needs to be

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<sup>80</sup> Mernissi, Fatema. *NGOs of the High Atlas*. Casablanca, 1997.

extended throughout the banking system, from the micro level to the macro level and international level, including commercial banks and Central Banks.<sup>81</sup>

Many progressive economists have set out proposals for improving the regulation of commercial banks, including the splitting of deposit taking activities from speculative trading in financial assets; but there has been less emphasis on creating/supporting large scale banks based on the “mutual” principle that they operate to the mutual benefit of depositors and borrowers, and not to make profits for shareholders. Such banks did flourish in some countries before financial liberalization, and in some they continue to exist. More of such banks should be encouraged. In addition, Central Banks should change the way in which they operate to become engines of employment growth and equality, not simply guardians of very low rates of inflation. To do this Central Banks need to explicitly set goals for employment creation as well as inflation control, and continue to sustain the expansionary monetary policies that many of them have adopted to counteract the economic recession until their economies are on a path of sustained job-creation. This will need to be supplemented by pro-active development banking that includes direction of subsidized credit to small-scale farmers, and businesses to women on an equitable basis with men. This will require re-training for bank officials to counteract any tendency they have to regard women’s businesses to be more risky; and recruitment of more women as loan officers, as they may be better placed to understand the potential of women’s businesses. Large scale businesses could also be eligible on the basis of their ability to create significant increase in decent work; and to develop new “green” technologies. One instrument to bring about a more equitable and sustainable allocation of credit is to combine government loan guarantees with asset portfolio requirements, requiring commercial banks to direct a certain percentage of their loans to the priority areas.<sup>82</sup>

To make socially useful banking feasible, and to create stable conditions for creation of decent work, it is important to reduce the volatility of financial flows in and out of national economies. Governments can introduce capital controls/stop inflows and outflows of short-term speculative funds. Malaysia did this in the Asian financial crisis of 1997, and as result was one of the first countries to recover from that crisis. Brazil has embarked on a similar exercise following the 2007/8 crisis. It is vital that the IMF changes its policy and supports such moves, rather than encouraging developing countries to keep larger reserves of foreign currency to tide them over periods of volatility. The latter policy is like requiring all motorists to carry higher levels of accident insurance rather than put traffic lights at road junctions.

### **Just and democratic public finance**

To complement socially useful banking, we must have just and democratic public finance.

This means fair taxation and equitable public expenditure, with citizen participation in determining priorities and monitoring and evaluating outcomes. Women scholars, activists and elected representatives have done much to try to transform government budgets in the 15 years since the Beijing Platform for Action called for gender-responsive budgeting. There have been

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<sup>81</sup> Seguino, Stephanie. “‘Rebooting’ Is Not An Option: Toward Equitable Social and Economic Development.” Essay for the forthcoming book.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

some successes in getting women more voice, and in re-orienting public finance to address women's poverty and gender equality. Here are some examples.<sup>83</sup>

Parliamentarians in Uganda have been assisted to look at the budget from the perspective of poor women by briefings produced by the Ugandan women's budget group, Forum for Women in Democracy. In the view of a former leading woman member of the Ugandan parliament these briefings gave gender issues 'credibility and respect'.

Women have increased their voice in participatory budgeting, pioneered in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, and adopted in many other cities in Latin America and Europe. At its best, participatory budgeting gives poor people a direct say in how local funds for new investment are used to improve local facilities (such as water and sanitation, drainage, paved roads, schools and clinics). In Porto Alegre women have always been present in large numbers in the neighbourhood participatory assemblies, typically constituting over half the participants. However, they were initially in a minority among representatives elected to the Area Forums and the city-wide Participatory Budget Council. Over time their share rose, and in 2000 half of the members of the Budget Council were women.

The Indonesian NGO, the Women's Research Institute (WRI) has promoted the application of GRB to maternal health services at the provincial and district levels. For example in South Lombok they concluded that maternal health services could be improved if more resources were allocated to the salaries of midwives (as opposed to doctors) and the purchase of motorbikes and sterile equipment for midwives (instead of ambulances and buildings). This led to an increased budget allocation to maternal services in South Lombok over a period of 3-4 years.

In Cuenca, in Ecuador, GRB led to earmarking of resources in the city budget for its Equal Opportunity Plan and guidelines to promote the hiring of more women on city investment projects.

In Tanzania, the Ministry of Water was one of six ministries included in the first phase of institutionalising gender analysis in budget processes, in collaboration with the women's organization, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). As a result, poverty and gender issues were included in the guidelines for the water sector budget. TGNP advocated for more resources for water and can claim some credit for the expansion of the resources going to the Ministry of Water from 3 per cent to 6 per cent of the budget.

In Australia, GRB was given renewed emphasis in 2009. Low income working women and their children are major beneficiaries of the federal government's 2009/10 budgetary commitment to introduce a national parental leave scheme in

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<sup>83</sup> Elson, Diane and Sharp, Rhonda." Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Women's Poverty" in S.Chant (ed) International Handbook on Gender and Poverty, Edward Elgar: 2010.

January 2011. This scheme provides a means-tested 18 weeks parental leave at the level of the federal minimum wage and is included in the forward budget estimates at a cost of \$731 million over five years.

The South African Women's Budget Initiative, a collaboration of parliamentarians and researchers, successfully argued for a change in Value Added Tax (VAT) on paraffin. Poor women do not come into the income tax net, but they do pay indirect taxes, such as sales tax and VAT. Indirect taxes are often regressive, with the poorest households paying a higher proportion of their income in taxes than the richest households because they have to spend almost all of their income in order to survive. The regressive incidence of VAT on poor people can be mitigated by zero-rating basic items, especially food. This is particularly important for poor women who are typically responsible for purchasing the day-to-day needs of the household. In South Africa a selection of basic foodstuffs has always been zero-rated, but some basic necessities were subject to VAT, including paraffin, which is bought by poor women for cooking. Analysis by the Women's Budget Initiative contributed to paraffin being zero rated.

Much of the impact of GRB has been at the local and regional level, or on specific taxes and public services. But there has been some impact on the overall budget process in some countries:<sup>84</sup>

In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Finance's budget call circular which guides the budget submissions of ministries, was amended to require ministries to evaluate their performance against the poverty and gender objectives outlined in the Bangladesh poverty reduction strategy.

In others, a gender equality perspective has been introduced in the process of development planning:

The National Planning Commission of India has set up a Committee of Feminist Economists (CFE) to advise on the gender dimensions of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. This moves the planning process beyond merely adding on a sector called "Development of Women and Children" to looking at women as growth agents. It enables a feminist perspective to be heard at the macroeconomic policy level rather than being confined to consultations with the Ministry for Women and Children.<sup>85</sup> As a result the 11th Plan refers frequently to women farmers and their difficulties in accessing inputs, credit, extension services and markets.

However, GRB has not as yet fully engaged with the macroeconomics of budgets at national level, with the issues of how tax systems can be reformed to generate more revenue in fair ways, how high public expenditure should be and what is the appropriate policy on budget deficits-when is an increasing deficit appropriate and when should it be cut. These kinds of policies determine how much is actually available for allocation at the places where women have won

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>85</sup> Jain, Devaki and Hameed, Syeda. "Feminist Economists Engage with India's Eleventh Five-Year Plan." Presented at the IAFFE Conference on Engendering Public Policy in Boston, June 2009.

more voice, at local level. This is the next frontier and will require more collaboration between progressive feminist economists and activists and elected representatives.

Taxes need to be fair in terms of gender and other forms of equality, raising complex issues of intersectionality for direct and indirect taxes paid by households and individuals.<sup>86</sup> It also needs to be fair in terms of the relative contributions of households and individuals on the one hand, and businesses and banks on the other. All over the world there has been a shift in the balance of contributions, with businesses and banks, especially large ones, paying a smaller and smaller share, and taking advantage of tax havens. Many governments are not raising enough tax revenue, and there is an urgent need to stop tax avoidance and evasion. Rather than simply campaigning for tax breaks for women's businesses, feminists need to raise their voices in the emerging campaigns for tax justice to raise more revenue at national and international levels: the G20 has begun to tackle this issue, but it is vital that momentum is not lost.

In addition, we need new forms of taxation that generate revenue in fair ways. For 10 years or more social movements and progressive economists have been calling for a tax on international financial transactions (often called a 'Tobin' tax after the economist who first proposed it). Now, such a tax is a serious possibility. Some members of the G20 are advocating a currency transaction tax (CTT). Proposals for CTT rates range between 0.005% and 0.25% of the value of each transaction, which would generate between \$35 and \$300 billion a year.<sup>87</sup> Women's organizations should press for the introduction of this tax by the governments responsible for the major world currencies in which most international financial transactions take place; and get involved in the debate on how the proceeds of such a tax should be used. We could propose earmarking a big chunk of those billions for a global fund for gender equality.

GRB also needs to engage with the budget deficits: when are they appropriate and when should they be cut back. The response to the financial crisis in some countries was an expansion of the deficit as part of a stimulus package. But in others, such as Ireland and Latvia, there have already been sharp cutbacks in public expenditure; and in others public expenditure cuts loom in the next 2 or 3 years. Those engaged in GRB need to be able to evaluate the claims that there are no alternatives to cuts, reminding governments that well allocated public expenditure can reduce inflationary pressures by relieving supply bottlenecks. For instance, public expenditure directed to supporting women farmers, both in their agricultural work and their unpaid work caring for their families, including fetching fuel and water, can help to increase the supply of food and bring down inflationary pressures.<sup>88</sup> Of course, there is a risk that public expenditure is not used in ways that support equitable and sustainable development, and so we must continue the pressure for women, especially low income women, to have more say in the allocation and evaluation of public expenditure.

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<sup>86</sup> Further explored in Grown, Caren and Valodia, Imraan (Eds). *Taxation and Gender Equity*. London: Routledge. Forthcoming 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Seguino, Stephanie. "'Rebooting' Is Not An Option: Toward Equitable Social and Economic Development."

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Socially responsible markets and fair trade**

Markets are a critical component of a just, equitable, and democratic economy, provided they are fair and balance competition with cooperation. Too many markets, national and international, have become dominated by large businesses that act as intermediaries between producers and consumers, taking the lion's share of the price that consumers pay. But many women's organizations have experience of markets built on direct links between small scale producers and consumers to the mutual benefit of both; face to face via village markets where farmers and craftspeople sell their goods; and online via the internet, enabling networks of small-scale enterprises<sup>89</sup> (including co-operatives and the self-employed<sup>90</sup>) to take advantages of economies of scope and scale.

There is a need to scale up such marketing alternatives, by building larger scale retailers and distributors that operate on principles of mutual benefit to producers, consumers, and themselves, rather than on the principle of making profits for shareholders. In some countries, such as the UK and Sweden, there are some large scale co-operative retailers, which offer fair prices to both producers and consumers, and decent work to their employees, and benefits to local communities through funding local community groups. In the UK the Cooperative Society (a large scale retailer and wholesaler) is also a long-time supporter of the rights of low income women. Such enterprises also extend these principles to importing from overseas producers, and are among the pioneers of international fair trade. We need to encourage the development of more of these socially responsible co-operative retailers.

But fair trade in international markets cannot simply rest on the actions of importing enterprises. It also requires a rethinking to the regulation of international trade. Again, this is an area in which women's organizations have played an important role, both regionally and with respect to the WTO. Women have stressed that trade liberalization is often at odds with livelihood security, fostering destructive competition rather than prosperity for all.<sup>91</sup> Trade liberalization definitely means a rise in imports; it may, but does not necessarily, lead to a rise in exports. There is no guarantee that those who lose their livelihoods through competition from cheaper imports will gain new employment in export sectors. The economic theory of the gains from trade liberalization argues that the increased competition from imports, and access to markets of trading partners who have also liberalized their imports, will lead to increases in efficiency and that this will generate sufficient extra output to allow those in a country who gain from trade liberalization to compensate those who lose. But such compensation rarely takes place, even in rich countries.<sup>92</sup> If we want to see more equitable forms of development, new trade agreements must be preceded by credible and properly funded systems of social protection, so that anyone who loses their livelihood is indeed fully compensated. More equitable development also

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<sup>89</sup> Henderson, Hazel. "Democratizing Finance." Accessed on June 30 and available at: [www.hazelhenderson.com/editorials/democratizing\\_finance.html](http://www.hazelhenderson.com/editorials/democratizing_finance.html).

<sup>90</sup> Jhabvala, Renana. "Poor Women Organising Themselves for Economic Justice."

<sup>91</sup> Jain, Devaki. "Free Trade Linkages with Social and Gender Justice." Keynote address presented at a Workshop conducted by the Centre of Trade and Development, 13-14 November 2009: New Delhi; Also look at the websites of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), Gender and Trade Network, and WIDE (Women in Development Europe)

<sup>92</sup> For the case of USA, Mexico and Nafta, see Balakrishnan, Radhika, Elson, Diane, and Patel, Raj. *Rethinking Macro Economic Strategies from a Human Rights Perspective*, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University, 2009.

requires a re-thinking of the non-discrimination provisions in international trade agreements. In international trade agreements, non-discrimination is defined in terms of the principle that the same rules should always apply to all business, irrespective of whether they are domestic or foreign owned. However, as is well recognised in human rights agreements, the application of formally equal rules to very unequal actors tends to institutionalize discrimination and lead to substantively unequal outcomes. Women organizing for human rights point to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which allows ‘special measures’ that treat women and men differently, in order to overcome women’s historical disadvantage. The same principle needs to be recognised in international trade agreements, allowing governments in poor countries to treat domestic firms differently from foreign firms, so as to enable domestic firms to improve their productivity. Creating level playing fields from the point of view of just and equality would be better served by regional agreements on decent work, such as common regional standards for minimum pay and job protection. This would help to guard against capital flight to the location with the worst labour conditions. Moreover, even successful expansion of exports is risky. As we have seen in 2008/9, perhaps the most important transmission channel of the recession to developing countries was via a fall in demand for exports. Some re-orientation to the domestic market would be less risky.<sup>93</sup> Demands for developing countries to liberalise imports need to be put on hold until their business owners and farmers have been able to develop the skills and acquire the technology that would enable them to match the productivity of businesses and farmers in developed countries.<sup>94</sup>

### **Support for equitable property rights**

A just, equal and democratic economy needs property rights (associated not only with ownership, but also with tenancy and with use of communal resources) to be much more widely dispersed. This can take place not only through redistributing title to land, but also through support for small businesses; and also support for collective forms of ownership and management, including cooperatives, employee-owned enterprises, municipally owned enterprises, and local committees for the management of natural resources. In all cases, support needs to be given to women to have rights, and exercise them, on the same basis as men. Moreover, formal title to individual property is not enough. It has to be supported by access to public services and infrastructure and credit; by contracts to supply the public sector; and by collective organization.<sup>95</sup>

Women owners of microenterprises have learnt the value of membership based organizations in strengthening their rights and voice; and some have managed to scale up to the international level. An example is StreetNet International, set up in November 2002. Membership-based organizations (unions, co-operatives or associations) directly organizing street vendors, market vendors and/or hawkers among their members, are entitled to affiliate to StreetNet International. The aim of StreetNet is to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors, market vendors and hawkers and on practical organizing and advocacy strategies. StreetNet International currently has more than 35 affiliates from 27 countries. It

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<sup>93</sup> “Asia’s export-led growth model is unsustainable.” *The Times of India*, 1 February 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Seguino, Stephanie, “The Way Forward in the Wake of the 2008 Global Economic Crisis: Does the Stiglitz Commission Go Far Enough?” paper presented at DAWN Development Debates, Mauritius, 2010.

<sup>95</sup> Agarwal, Bina. *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

engages in international forums such as the ILO and has taken up the international campaign of *World Class Cities for ALL*. This campaign aims to challenge this traditional approach to building “World Class Cities” and create a new, more inclusive concept of “World Class Cities for All” with the participation of street vendors and other groups of the (urban) poor. The campaign has a strong focus on women and other vulnerable street vendors.<sup>96</sup>

The main, and often only, property of the majority of people in many countries is, of course, their own capacity for work. An equal and just and democratic society requires that labour rights must also be strengthened, including rights at work and to organize collectively. Women have been at the forefront of developing new forms of workers’ organizations that include informal workers as well as formal workers; and recognize and organize around the unpaid domestic work of workers as well as their paid work. SEWA is the earliest example, although there are today many organisations in the same model. Registered as a trade union SEWA, is different from the traditional trade union in a number of ways. First, it brings together workers from many different trades ranging from urban street vendors to rural livestock breeders, unlike most trade unions which organise workers of one trade. Second, it organises workers who are generally not in factories. In the informal economy, women tend to work in non-factory settings—in their own homes as home-based workers, in others’ homes as domestic servants, in fields as agricultural labourers, in public places as street vendors, in their own enterprises as self-employed workers. Third, it not only organises for higher wages or enterprise benefits, but for a whole variety of needs ranging from developmental needs like skill training and micro finance, to social security and child care, to education; it follows an integrated approach. The form of organising adopted by SEWA is dictated by what the women workers need.<sup>97</sup>

### **Realizing Economic and Social Rights as an Objective of Economic Policy**

An important way to re-orient economic policy in support of equitable, just and sustainable development is to make the realization of economic and social rights an explicit objective of policy. Governments do have an obligation to progressively realize economic and social rights, using the maximum available resources, under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). But these obligations are not in the forefront of the minds of Ministers of Finance, who may not even be aware of them; and if they are aware of them, may think that promoting economic growth will take care of them. The crises of finance, food and fuel, have shown how far that is from being the case.

It is necessary to pay direct attention to the realization of economic and social rights, guided by the key principles of *Non-discrimination and Equality, Minimum Essential Levels, Non-Retrogression, Accountability, Participation and Transparency*.<sup>98</sup>

A fundamental aspect of states’ human rights obligations is that of non-discrimination and equality. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

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<sup>96</sup> Renana Jhabvala “Poor Women Organising Themselves for Economic Justice.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Radhika. Balakrishnan and Diane Elson, ‘Auditing Economic Policy in the Light of Obligations on Economic and Social Rights’, Essex Human Rights Review, Vol. No 5. No. 1, 2008.

*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.*<sup>99</sup>

CEDAW prohibits discrimination against women in all its forms and obligates States to take steps ‘by all appropriate means and without delay’ to pursue a policy of eliminating this discrimination (Article 2). It is clear that CEDAW does not only mean the absence of a discriminatory legal framework, but also means that policies must not be discriminatory in effect. CEDAW requires that states achieve both substantive and formal equality and recognizes that formal equality alone is insufficient for a state to meet its affirmative obligation to achieve substantive equality between men and women.<sup>100</sup>

States that are parties to the ICESCR are under an obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, ‘minimum essential levels of each of the rights’ in the ICESCR. This means that a state party in which any ‘significant number’ of persons is ‘deprived of essential foodstuffs, of essential primary health care, etc. is prima facie failing to meet obligations’ under the Covenant.<sup>101</sup> Even in times of severe resource constraints, states must ensure that rights are fulfilled for vulnerable members of society.

There is a strong presumption that retrogressive measures on the part of a State are not permitted. An example of a potentially retrogressive measure would be cuts to expenditures on public services that are critical for realization of economic and social rights; or cuts to taxes that are critical for funding such services. If such retrogressive measures are deliberate, then the State has to show that they have been ‘introduced after consideration of all alternatives and are fully justifiable by reference to totality of rights provided for in the Covenant and in context of the full use of the maximum of available resources.’<sup>102</sup> For example, cutting government spending on health and education, while not cutting expenditure on arms will likely violate the principle of non-retrogression.

The process through which policy is made and implemented is also important. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has indicated that: ‘the international human rights normative framework includes the right of those affected by key decisions to participate in the relevant decision-making processes.’<sup>103</sup>

It has also emphasized that: ‘rights and obligations demand accountability...whatever the mechanisms of accountability, they must be accessible, transparent and effective.’<sup>104</sup>

The importance of rights to food, to work, to an adequate standard of living, and to social security has been particularly highlighted by the crises. They cannot be fully realized overnight, but progress can be made everywhere in the realization of those rights, giving priority to those

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<sup>99</sup> UDHR, Article 2

<sup>100</sup> CEDAW, General Recommendation 25, para. 8.

<sup>101</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (CESCR) General Comment 3, para. 10.

<sup>102</sup> CESCR, General Comment 3, para. 9; CESCR, General Comment 12, para. 45; CESCR, General Comment 14, para. 32; CESCR, General Comment 15, para. 19.

<sup>103</sup> United Nations, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2001, para.12, UN Doc. E/C.12/2001/10

<sup>104</sup> United Nations, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2001, para. 14. UN Doc. E/C.12.2001/10

with least enjoyment of those rights; and introducing new laws to entrench these rights as legal entitlements, available to women as well as to men.<sup>105</sup> Women have shown, in the case of violence against women, that global mobilization can help human rights become more of a reality. Through similar mobilization we can hold governments to account in respecting, promoting and fulfilling economic and social rights.

### **Reforming economic reasoning**

It will be difficult to design the kinds of policies needed to secure equitable, just and sustainable economies without fundamental reforms in economic reasoning. The kind of reasoning that has dominated policy in the neo-liberal era deliberately ignores the issue of equality of outcomes. The criterion of success is maximizing the output to be obtained from available resources; the distribution of the output is a secondary matter. The actions of governments are typically presumed to entail the imposition of costs, in terms of a loss of efficiency (measured in terms of outputs of goods and services) compared with what could be achieved by competitive markets. In the jargon of neoclassical economics, government actions typically ‘distort’ the operation of economies, compared with the benchmark of a competitive market economy, assumed to be able to operate without any government intervention. But a competitive economy places no limits on inequality and does not even guarantee physical survival for all the people who compete. There is nothing to prevent feast and famine from co-existing. There is nothing to prevent what Amartya Sen calls “entitlement failure”.<sup>106</sup> There is nothing to steer the economy towards realization of economic and social rights. In future, the costs of inequality (not only in opportunity but also in outcomes) need to be factored in to economic reasoning.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, cost-benefit analysis should only be applied within the human rights framework. Policy options must first be judged in terms of their compliance with human rights, and then cost-benefit analysis can be applied to the ones that have met that test.<sup>108</sup>

In addition, both outputs and inputs need to be judged in holistic terms, including non-market inputs and outputs, as well as market inputs and outputs. This idea has gained ground in relation to natural resources and pollution. But not yet in relation to unpaid work in households and communities, and the services this work produces. Here we might try a new tack. As well as pressing for national level time-use surveys and satellite accounts, we might press for every appraisal of new investment, or reorganization of production and delivery, to include the impact on unpaid work, estimating whether the investment or reorganization is likely to reduce or increase the amount of time that has to be spent on unpaid work.

Economic reasoning needs to be woven into the political arena – the separation of the political from the economic has been one of the flaws in the design and implementation of economic policy. The early classical economists wrote treatises on the political economy, not just on the economy. Measures such as the GDP and behaviour of markets measured by NASDAQ or the

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<sup>105</sup> Elson, Diane. “Economics for a Post-Crisis World: Putting Social Justice First.”

<sup>106</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

<sup>107</sup> Wilkinson, Richard and Pickett, Kate, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, London, 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Radhika. Balakrishnan and Diane Elson, ‘Auditing Economic Policy in the Light of Obligations on Economic and Social Rights’, *Essex Human Rights Review*, Vol. No 5. No. 1, 2008.

Sensex in India needs to be changed into other measures, say of number of children who are malnourished or persons who are unemployed or hungry.<sup>109</sup>

Points of economic power have made dramatic shifts in the last few years – especially since the crisis. There is a dramatic shift in the profiles of GDP growth from the North to the South.<sup>110</sup> New global clubs have emerged as players at the negotiating table, whether at CoP15 or the G20 summits in Davos and Pittsburgh.<sup>111</sup> However the new power clubs – are following the same paths as the old power clubs, return to “normal”.<sup>112</sup> There is need to engage with these regional trading and otherwise integrating economies clubs. They provide a new space for reform, including opportunities to introduction of legislations which protect the deprived, the worker, especially women.

Further, in shifting economic power from single or even dual poles, it is important to shift the existing cartels also, such as the wheat cartel, the oil cartel, even the waste cartel, and have virtual reality constructed sharing of knowledge on basic items such as food grains, water, etc. across continents of the South, so power points are diffused, and prices are not monopolistically fixed.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusions

Finally, if one analyses that the lack of real success in the efforts of the feminist movement to make a change in economic reasoning, it is due to lack of a strong collective, and unified voice drawn out of broader and broader organizational spaces. This then leads us to suggest that an organized voice and strong almost single-minded campaign for economic democracy and economic justice creating policy is required to understand and remove the very specific deprivation/poverty that women are embedded in.

There is no one path to the creation of equitable, just and sustainable development. But women’s organizations in many countries have begun to create a path by walking. Goals and targets may help us get there, but only if they are embedded in a fuller vision of what development is and may become. We hope our deliberations will spark fruitful discussion of how we can move from crisis to equality. This is our unfinished task to intervene and transform the economics of these economic configurations.

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<sup>109</sup> Measures of well-being such as Gross National Happiness (GNH Index) in Bhutan “Where Happiness Outranks Wealth” Development Magazine, available at: [www.developments.org.uk/articles/bhutan-where-happiness-outranks-wealth](http://www.developments.org.uk/articles/bhutan-where-happiness-outranks-wealth), the Legatum Prosperity Index; The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress suggests that in addition to objective indicators of well-being, subjective measures of the quality of life should also be considered.

<sup>110</sup> Bhusurnath, Mythili. “Annus not-so Horribilus.” The Economic Times, 2 Sep 2009, 4.

<sup>111</sup> 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. “In Davos, Signs of Shift in Global Power.” New York Times, 27 January 2010;

<sup>112</sup> Jain, Devaki. “Gendering the Macro-economic Sky.” Paper presented at the *High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and Its Regional and Global Outcomes*, 16-18 November 2009, Bangkok, p3.

<sup>113</sup> The third IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) Summit held in Delhi in October 2008. The declaration is available at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs website <http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2008/10/15pr02.htm>