



Women's Rights in the Global Economy: Can Feminists Transform Development?



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The struggle for gender equality ranks as one of our century's defining movements. This struggle has won women in Canada and around the developed world the right to vote, to own property, to earn an education, and to work outside the home for wages. It has also won them the right to physical safety within their own homes. Where men once had the legal right to beat their wives with a stick no thicker than a thumb -hence the phrase "the rule of thumb" -society now invokes laws and penalties against domestic violence.

Women's status in developing countries has also improved dramatically. Thirty years ago, few women could read or write or were active in the formal labour force. Today, Southern women have made significant advances in literacy, health, and employment.

Despite these notable changes, the pursuit of women's rights remains an ongoing crusade, blocked by many obstacles: social attitudes, religions, laws, and institutions can prevent women from engaging fully in society. For example, parliaments remain overwhelmingly male, with men holding 90 percent of the seats worldwide. Meanwhile, about 70 percent of the world's poor are women.

However, as we race toward the millennium, many feminist activists, researchers, advocates, and groups are united in challenging another common foe to the women's progress -the global economy.

Globalization has meant gains for many, but women -especially poor women -bear great burdens under economic restructuring. Today private markets drive the global economy and dominate North-South economic relations. Thus, while globalization can generate economic growth, increase productivity, and raise standards of living, it has also featured unemployment, vanishing social services, and unregulated working conditions. In short, globalization is contributing to the widening gap between rich and poor and, in many cases, undermining gender equality.

Therefore, a growing cadre of feminists is challenging the main forces behind the global economic system: specifically, its institutional architects and the corporations that benefit from it. In working toward their objective of universal human rights and human development -which is how I personally define feminism's goals -feminist researchers and activists in the North and South are, indeed, attacking the discipline of economics itself.

Part of this attack against the established economic regime involves questioning one of the long-held assumptions about development, namely that everyone benefits from it. This assumption is false: women and men have different roles and responsibilities, access to, and degrees of control over productive resources. If development is to foster equitable and sustainable growth, then the goal of the entire development community now must be to create an economic system that does not reinforce this inequality or undermine recent gains. The income disparities between women and men, rich and poor, are an indictment of economic progress.

Tonight, drawing on my experiences as a Northern feminist researcher and activist working with feminists in the South, I'd like to do three things:

first, briefly illustrate the implications of global economic change for gender equality;

second, describe and critique how feminist research and activism are responding to globalization; and

finally, in light of all this, tackle that difficult question -can feminists reform mainstream economics and transform development?

It would be misleading to claim that all women are hurt by the global economy. Globalization does, however, contribute to the inequalities inherent to the world's economic system. Its effects depend on a number of factors, among them, gender, class, age, education level, ethnicity, and geographic location. For our purposes tonight, I will describe three examples of the global economy's impact on women: structural adjustment in Africa, trade liberalization in Bangladesh, and the effects of the Asian financial crisis.

1. Structural adjustment in Africa

For more than a decade, African countries have been undergoing structural adjustment policies as a prescription for economic growth. With the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) promising universal economic benefits as incentives, African nations have followed the institutional call to get their economic houses in order. These universal 'no pain no gain' measures include the privatization of state-controlled services; financial and trade liberalization; openness to direct foreign investment; tax reform; and fiscal discipline.

One sobering outcome of these economic reform measures has been a radical shift in the role of the state. Where the state once assumed responsibility for providing public services in such sectors as health, education, and transportation, the trend now is toward deregulation and privatization.

As governments discharge their responsibility to provide adequate healthcare, education, public transport or agricultural extension services, the onus for meeting these needs falls to women. Why? Because women are society's primary caregivers - ensuring that the family is fed, stays healthy, is educated, and so on. The gender division of labour within the household and the community continues to be a fundamental dividing line between women and men.

In 1995, I was a member of a participatory research team that included the North-South Institute and a Ghanaian non-governmental organization, The Centre for the Development of the People. The research examined how macroeconomic reforms affected women in the Volta Region of eastern Ghana. For example, the introduction of user fees for health services in the late 1980s proved to be such a disincentive that women, who are responsible for family health, stopped bringing their children to clinics, even for infections or serious illnesses such as malaria. Doctors reported that women themselves were presenting much more complex, chronic, and terminal ailments because they delayed seeking medical treatment (Brown and Kerr, 1997). The women of the Volta Region, being cash poor, used the little cash they had to buy food or pay for transport rather than health care.

2. Trade Liberalization in Bangladesh

My second example touches on the global economy's impact on women in Bangladesh. Employment has been transformed in Bangladesh as government and business, in their efforts to produce cost-effective and competitive exports for the global market, look for a cheap and flexible labour force. Who makes up that cheaper, adaptable labour force? Women. Millions of women are now employed and are preferred to their male counterparts. They are considered to be more productive, submissive, and less likely to form unions demanding better wages, working and health conditions.

A recent study of Bangladesh's garment sector conducted by the North-South Institute and Nari Uddug Kendra, a local women's organization, found:

Y women in the garment industry working between 11 and 16 hours per day, seven days a week C while continuing to shoulder the lion's share of household chores and child rearing. Women were responsible for finding their own housing, a scarce and sometimes insecure commodity in Bangladesh. They often have no access to even basic utilities, toilet facilities, and clean drinking water. They endure such workplace hazards as poor ventilation, cramped conditions, and risk of fire C last year many workers were killed during a garment factory fire in Dhaka where the exit doors were locked. Travel to and from factories is dangerous C many women have been subjected to harassment, assault, and even rape. Wages are poor C so low that workers frequently cannot afford to buy enough food for themselves and their families. Finally, when they are no longer capable of factory work, women find few opportunities for alternative employment (Delahanty, 1998; p. 2).

Despite these conditions, it has to be emphasized that such employment opportunities have given women their own earnings, and improved their autonomy. In the words of Saleha, a married Bangladeshi factory worker: AAs I am earning now, our financial situation is betterYhe does not beat me like beforeY there are less quarrels; there are days even when I speak up to him, he does not argue with me because I am helping with the money " (Kabeer, 1995; p. 34).

Obviously women prefer jobs with dignity, but first and foremost they want jobs. The imperatives of trade liberalization may satisfy the latter, but too often disregard the former. Market share and competition rely on a steady flow of cheap labour. Profit margins may hinge on keeping women in lower positions earning low wages. Developing country governments turn a blind eye to companies that disregard international and national labour standards, given the overriding imperative within this global economic system to attract foreign investment and create jobs.

3. Financial crisis in Asia

A third example of the gendered nature of the global economy's impact can be found in Asia's current financial crisis. This crisis, which erupted in Thailand and spread to Korea, Indonesia, and other parts of East and Southeast Asia, has caused these economies to crash B with profoundly human effects. One of the underlying causes of the crisis was the premature liberalization of financial markets. Open financial markets are the trademark of globalization, providing corporations and investors the freedom to do business anywhere and to seek out the highest profits without state interference. To give you an idea of the scale of this activity, foreign currency transactions are estimated at US \$1.3 trillion daily (Culpeper, 1996). In Asia, this trade, along with short-term investments, created inflows and outflows of money with profoundly destabilizing effects.

Demand for labour has plummeted and unemployment is rising sharply. Evidence suggests that women have been among the first to lose their jobs, laid off because they are disproportionately represented in the sectors that have been most vulnerable,

namely, banking, electronics, textiles, and services. Millions of women are now turning to the informal sector, desperately seeking employment. Sadly, this has led in some countries to an overwhelming number of women and girls entering prostitution (Lim, 1998).

These three examples (adjustment in Africa, trade liberalization Bangladesh, and Asia's financial crisis) illustrate some of the ways in which the global economic system perpetuates gender inequalities. These changes brought about by globalization, therefore, are altering the terrain on which the struggle for gender equality is and should be fought. That is why within this decade, a considerable amount of feminist research and activism has shifted to challenging the global economic system C the rules that sustain it, the institutions that support it, and the governments that defend it. Just how this is being done, and how successfully, will be the focus of my next remarks.

The feminist strategies to create sustainable and equitable economies reflect the pluralism of feminism and of the women's movement itself. They have assumed many forms, emerging from different fora setting a range of priorities. Here are just five areas where feminists are challenging the economic status quo:

mainstream economics

the World Bank

corporations and the private sector

national governments; and

the fostering of participatory economics.

We are living in an age where the dominant economic theology trumpets the glory of capitalism and the primacy of markets. Under this doctrine, the higher the growth rate, the better off a society is as a whole. National well-being, according to mainstream economics, is thus measured according to the growth of a country's Gross National Product per capita, or GNP. GNP is a measure of the monetary transactions in our economy. Economic and social policies are the tools used by policymakers, that is governments, to increase GNP (and therefore increase growth).

This GNP yardstick, however, does not correlate with the reality of human well-being. If growth is up in Ontario for instance, why are there more homeless on the streets? Why are hospitals and women's shelters shutting down? Why are more people using food banks? Why are so many young people unemployed?

Feminist economists like Marilyn Waring (a noted author and former Member of Parliament in New Zealand) have said the GNP is a useless indicator of human welfare for two main reasons:

1. The GNP does not differentiate between "a enriching production" and Adestructive production" (Waring, 1998).

I personally made a huge contribution to Canada's GNP a couple of years agoYmy house burned down. This provided hours of work to the fire and police departments, various lawyers, and insurance companies. Then of course there was the work involved in demolishing the charred remains, the construction of a new house, and my subsequent purchase of various (and many) sundries to replace my belongings. According to the national accounts that fire was registered in the Again" column - nowhere is it measured as a loss. And so, in the much larger examples cited by Waring, environmental and human disasters such as the Exxon Valdez spill or wars are perceived as huge boosts to the economy.

2. The GNP's definition of economic activity is too narrow: it only acknowledges production that involves some monetary transaction. In other words, all the unpaid labour that men and especially women provide every day, such as the cooking, cleaning, and caring work that sustains our families and our societies is invisible and unvalued, according to the GNP's yardstick.

According to the United Nations, 'women's wo rk' would add up to \$11 trillion a year, a huge contribution to the world economy, if a monetary value were placed on it. If this work were remunerated, property rights, divorce settlements, and collateral for credit would be thoroughly transformed. 'Housewives' would no longer be viewed as dependents, but as valued workers in their own right. Women who perform both paid and unpaid work would be credited for their double contribution.

Some feminists are also pushing for a better yardstick to measure economic activity and human welfare C a yardstick based on time instead of money. A measurement that included both components would provide a more realistic picture of what it truly costs for a society to function and would make national accounts, so essential to economic policymaking, more accurate (Waring, 1998). Records of time spent on activities would also identify crisis points and indicate where services are needed.

Our Ghanaian study provided such an example. Our research found that the majority of women's time was spent growing and processing food for family consumption. Yet the agricultural policy imposed by the World Bank and the government of Ghana was targeted to increase maize yields. Women knew that an increase in maize output would not necessarily increase their income; they didn't have time to process any extra maize. If those time constraints were recognized the government would be more likely to ensure women had a mill to grind maize than continue to deliver high yielding maize seeds.

Fortunately, accounting for women's unpaid work is slowly gaining recognition. At the 1995 UN Conference on Women, women's groups succeeded in having women's work included in the so-called Asatellite" or marginal national accounts. You may remember that in the last Canadian census 10 percent of households received a survey about unpaid work. Slowly, slowly, women's contribution is being made visible.

Now, feminist economists like Diane Elson emphasize that feminists need to build on this critical work of making women's economic contribution visible and move from the micro to the macro in order to transform the practice of macroeconomics. This means changing the economic growth models that macroeconomists in the IMF or finance departments use to design economies and expand growth. In the past year, a network of international feminist economists has begun to develop

macroeconomic growth models that introduce gender relations and unpaid work as intervening variables. The objective of this exciting initiative is to create economic models that become instruments for empowering rather than burdening women.

But in order for mainstream economists to recognize the benefits of these new conceptual tools and theories, feminists will have to work from within the system, as well as push for change from the outside. As Elson aptly argues:

If we only work on the 'inside' we run the risk of merely achieving small improvements in the formulation of models or collection of statistics which do not actually transform women's lives. If we only work on the 'outside,' we run the risk of simply communicating with those who already share our viewpoint, and of not engaging with actual processes of macro-economic policy making. That requires some willingness to get to know and speak the language of the insiders: economists, statisticians, Ministries of Finance and Governors of Central Banks (Elson, 1998; pp. 155-56).

As one of the chief architects of the global economy, the World Bank has been targeted for criticism from women's groups around the world. The Bank is widely viewed as an ardent supporter of macroeconomic policies that have, in many cases, placed women and the poor at further disadvantage.

The Bank does not take criticism lightly and has defended itself in several ways. Some World Bank staff have complained that their critics, women activists or NGOs, do not understand the intricate details of their policies. The Bank argues that without knowing the outcome of the counterfactual scenario, that is, whether circumstances would have been better had structural adjustment not been applied, critics of adjustment do not have a justifiable or informed argument. Others argue that the negative impacts of economic reform have more to do with the way the governments themselves have interpreted and implemented the policies, and that governments use the Bank to cover up their own wrong doings. Although there may be some truth in these latter statements, it is important to remember that developing nations have no real choice in implementing macroeconomic reforms or not. They must carry out the fiscal policies required by the World Bank and IMF or risk losing future loans or partial debt forgiveness.

Given the reticence of economists and other Bank staff (and, in fact, most large development agencies) to seriously consider their policies' gender implications, feminists have tried more of an 'insider' approach. As Bank staff and economists aim for efficiency in their development projects, gender researchers and advocates have pointed out the correlation between achieving development goals and integrating gender in policies, aligning women's interests with the Bank's pursuit of efficiency. Focus on women, they tell the Bank, and your development outcomes will follow.

Many of you may be aware of the enthusiastic focus that top development policymakers have placed on promoting education for girls. This support stems from long-standing arguments that educating girls leads to "multiple payoffs" including later marriages, increased contraceptive usage, lower fertility, reduced infant and child mortality, and higher female earnings.

But we have to be careful in using these arguments. The inherent danger of promoting policies that serve other interests is that inevitably women are seen as a means to an end. Because education for girls is not the goal but a by-product, the quality of that education suffers. Gender equality is not seen as a legitimate goal in itself. The project's objectives are rendered technical rather than political and ultimately fail to address the systemic nature of gender and social injustices.

Certainly many in these large development agencies are not yet ready to acknowledge gender equality as a goal in and of itself. In 1995, I was part of a major study on the gender dimensions of World Bank structural adjustment policies. The research was commissioned by the Special Program for Africa, the multi-donor group that plans how structural adjustment loans will be imposed. Here was an opportunity to open a dialogue with the insiders.

The research results, based on qualitative and quantitative surveys conducted in several African countries, were presented at a summit of representatives from development cooperation agencies, the World Bank, and the IMF. Our findings clearly illustrated how gender biases in markets and government departments were replicated and reinforced by apparently "gender-neutral" macro-economic variables. In other words, even if the structural adjustment policy in itself didn't have a differential effect on women and men, the institutions through which the policies were imposed had an inherent gender bias. Thus, the outcome is essentially the same. Our research showed that as a result of these effects, not only were women negatively affected but also agricultural output suffered and food security was threatened.

At the end of the three-day summit, the World Bank economist made his conclusion. He said: "I'm still not convinced that structural adjustment has a negative impact on women. But I am convinced that women's inequality has a negative impact on economic growth." In other words, World Bank policies didn't need to change, only the barriers that hinder women from contributing to agricultural production and export promotion. The Bank used the results of our research to justify its position. Women are seen as an 'untapped' labour source, as merely instruments to growth. This reasoning perpetuates their exploitation.

Not everyone at the Bank shares this view. In recent years, there have been indications that the Bank is changing. Many women have been encouraged by the World Bank President James Wolfensohn's commitment to address gender gaps.

Another hopeful harbinger of change lies in the work of a new campaign. "Women's Eyes on the World Bank" was launched by women's groups and NGOs at the UN World Conference on Women in 1995. It monitors the Bank's progress in bringing its lending operations in line with the "Platform for Action" objectives. The campaign seeks a major reorientation of World Bank policies and projects, making them support women's empowerment and equality and respond to women's needs.

Since the campaign's start, the Bank has initiated Regional Gender Action Plans, opened up Bank-NGO dialogues in several developing countries, and launched the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative, a joint NGO-World Bank study into the effects of adjustment in seven countries. Women's Eyes maintains pressure on the Bank for further change by publicly releasing regular progress reports and letters to Bank officials.

While the World Bank has been targeted for change by feminist groups (and it is an easy target), we must also pay attention to the policies and programs of other players in the international financial system, such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the regional development banks.

Challenging corporations

The third strand in the feminist challenge to the economic status quo lies in its approach to the private sector and its efforts to link corporate and equality goals. Corporations are the global economy's biggest players and its biggest winners. Foreign private investment in developing countries in the 1990s alone has grown five-fold and translates into investments of almost one trillion dollars (Sutherland and Sewell, 1998). In comparison, the investment in development cooperation is a drop in the bucket.

Campaigns to make corporations more responsible have been waged for decades: environmentalists have tackled companies that pollute; indigenous groups have lobbied for land claims; and labour groups have demanded better working conditions and, recently, the eradication of child labour. Now Southern women's groups have become active on behalf of women factory workers.

Consumer boycotts have often been used as an effective measure against recalcitrant companies, hitting them where it hurts the most - the bottom line.

Women's groups have had to be careful, however, not to demonize all corporations as violators of women's human rights. External criticisms may result in reprisals, and poor women are dependent on those jobs; they cannot afford to lose them. If they organize against their employer they run the risk of being fired.

The recent campaign to ban child labour contained some very useful lessons. Delve into the issue of child labour and it quickly becomes apparent that there is more at stake than removing children from the workforce. Many children accompany their mothers to the factories - they are safer in the factories than alone out on the streets. With limited or no access to schooling or care, children may be more protected within a work environment. The key then lies in finding ways to secure fair practices and working conditions that respect the needs of women and their families.

Towards that end, and as a result of external pressure, some corporations are introducing voluntary codes of conduct, covering ethical, environmental, and labour practices in all their operations, both domestic and abroad. As described in the North-South Institute's published survey of Canadian corporations and social responsibility, such codes of conduct are a promising tool for increasing accountability to workers and consumers.

However, concerns remain about the effectiveness of voluntary codes. First, how are standards monitored and enforced? Who does the monitoring? Who pays for it? Second, these codes are not substitutes for national laws on workers' rights. Codes of conduct may give the impression of improved standards without actually delivering them. The false assumption that these standards are being met may impede or prevent needed government legislation. Finally, and most important, codes of conduct cannot ultimately influence a global production system dependent on cheap and flexible female labour.

Feminist researchers and activists however must do more to engage the private sector and encourage corporations to integrate gender equality into their practices and operations. While many companies have begun to heed environmental sustainability or indigenous people's rights, social policy, let alone equality issues, are often seen as less important. Corporate responsibility to women's rights in the workplace therefore must be pursued, from the factory floor to the CEO's office.

Challenging governments

Feminists are employing a fourth tactic in their efforts to reform economic policies: challenging governments. While some argue that governments are losing their ability to govern in this global economic system, in reality economic change is driven by the decisions made by governments. Government support of liberalizing trade, open markets, and deregulation often ignores the potentially negative effects of these strategies on the poor, particularly on poor women.

The 1995 UN World Conference on Women provided the most visible and international focus on governments' responsibilities toward women's rights. More than 35,000 women from all over the world went to Beijing, many of them to share their experiences of working conditions, inadequate healthcare, or lack of access to technology in the context of globalization. NGOs had unprecedented access to government delegates attending the numerous preparatory meetings and the Beijing summit, and they lobbied intensely for substantive changes in the final document C the Platform for Action.

While this effort had its merits, given the countless hours and resources that went into this UN conference, I'm not sure it was worth it. Let me give you three brief reasons:

1. The UN used a sectoral approach whereby all women's problems, and their solutions, fell under 12 separate categories: violence against women, women's poverty, women's health, environment, and so on. This approach denies any strategizing about the structural causes of gender discrimination - the underlying causes or how these issues relate to each other.
2. The real powers within governments do not seriously heed the outcomes of UN conferences. Generally the participants attending the meetings represent the minor government ministries; finance ministers are rarely in attendance.
3. Because of the nature and the intended use of these documents (i.e., they are to be universally applied to all countries), most of the Beijing recommendations addressing globalization are vague. Take, for example, the following:

Governments should pursue and implement sound and stable macroeconomic and sectoral policies that are designed and monitored with the full and equal participation of women, encourage broad-based sustained economic growth, address the structural causes of poverty and are geared towards eradicating poverty and reducing gender-based inequality within the overall framework of achieving people-centred sustainable development.

These are indeed essential strategies. Recommendations like these took hours to negotiate and so are considered hard won battles. But like any UN conference document, the words mean nothing until they are turned into action, until they are

implemented according to the reality of that particular country. But in most countries, the leadership required to transform these words into new policies or programs is NOT going to come from government. Governments need to be pressured and held accountable to these international commitments by the women's organizations, researchers, and activists who pushed for these commitments in the first place. Policymakers need to be shown actual, viable alternatives. We can push for governments to address the structural causes of poverty or restructure the allocation of public expenditure, but unless we show them HOW, actual change is unlikely to happen.

That's why an initiative like the Women's Budget in South Africa is such an engaging example of how to create viable alternatives for governments - a 'manual' for governments to address gender equality and social justice. South African women launched the Women's Budget Initiative in 1995, which set out to create a national budget that promoted women's rights.

South African women recognized that the national budget is the monetary embodiment of policies and programs. Budget allocations indicate the state's commitment to policies and programs according to the resources they are allocated. Most government budgets are gender-biased, overlooking the ways in which programs and policies either fail to address women's oppression or exacerbate it.

For example, if a national budget provides tax incentives to corporations instead of rebates for childcare, discrimination will not be alleviated. Or if part time workers, who are mostly women, aren't allowed to collect social security or other employment benefits, then the budget can actually foster gender discrimination.

The purpose of the South African initiative is to ensure that every government department annually draws up its own "women's budget," analyzing every line item for its impact on women. The success of the South Africa model is inspiring women elsewhere to create women's budgets as transformative tools for equality. In the past two years alone, "women's budgets" initiatives have been developed in Tanzania, Uganda, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, with more likely to come soon.

Finally, we arrive at the fifth strategy for feminist research and activism: participatory economics. If economic policymaking is to truly contribute to the human rights of all, it needs to become more transparent, democratic, and participatory. Women need a greater voice. The pressure to transform economic decision-making to promote equality and social justice will have to come from players on the inside and the outside. While feminist economists within Ministries of Finance and the World Bank are needed, a critical mass of feminist researchers and activists who are able to analyze and influence economic policies and institutions - who can speak the language of economics - is essential.

Two years ago, I undertook a program called the Gender and Economic Reforms in Africa program, or GERA for short, with the North-South Institute and women from across Africa.

We began by securing a pool of money and then gathered together 25 African women and men from NGOs, universities, and women's groups across Africa, to determine the most strategic use of these funds. We set about building African capacity to critically analyze global economic processes from a gender perspective. The GERA mission is to weave a pan-African movement of women and men, to develop alternative and transformative economic policies that ensure gender equity and economic justice.

To meet these goals, we created a fund for African women and their organizations to carry out projects that link research and advocacy. These were linked to ensure that the research would be proactive, used by policymakers, instead of lying dormant on desks or library shelves. Linking research and advocacy work also ensures the lobbying effort is supported by rigorous research, so that it is more likely to be seriously considered by the decision-makers.

Many people in the development community were skeptical about the project's goals. They said there weren't enough women in Africa who understood economic reform, and those who did were overextended. Nevertheless, we sent out the call for proposals as widely as possible. Within two months, we had received 180 proposals from across Africa. This year GERA has provided fifteen \$40,000 grants to African women and their organizations in 11 sub-Saharan countries.

The projects cover a range of issues. One will analyze the role of market women in economic decision-making. West Africa's biggest market in Kumasi, Ghana, is run by women who not only make a huge contribution to the economy, but who also constitute the national food distribution network. Trade liberalization policies and market reform directly affect them. These women however, are excluded from all decision-making. The outcome of this participatory and action research project aims to enable Kumasi market women to participate in economic policymaking at the local level, establishing a schedule of regular meetings between traders and local government officials.

We also received a proposal from three women within the Central Bank of Uganda. They recognized that changes in the financial sector could seriously hurt women's access to financial services and credit. They proposed to analyze the Bank of Uganda's lending policies, processes, and programs from a gender perspective, with the objective of offering future programs that are both participatory and gender sensitive. There were long debates among the selection committee - a group of eight African women - on whether GERA should support a project within a central bank when our priority was to fund NGOs. The proposal was finally funded because it offered an opportunity to strategically support women trying to change an institution from inside.

In Burkina Faso and Togo, researchers and activists are looking at the recent major currency devaluation and its effect on gender relations. The goal is to determine the relationship between exchange rate fluctuations specifically, and monetary policy generally, on women's lives. Given that the francophone African franc will soon be tied to the European currency, the research hopes to shed light on potentially future negative effects, and will yield useful lessons for other countries undergoing currency devaluation.

The project teams are using innovative ways to disseminate their findings. Street theatre, radio plays, television broadcasts, and gender awareness training are a few of the communication tools being used.

GERA has hosted three meetings in Africa, bringing together project team leaders or the African steering committee. At each event, we meet with local policy-makers, women's groups, bankers, NGOs, and members of the development community to

explain and explore the links between economic reform, gender equality, and social justice.

While the GERA program won't change women's lives in Africa overnight, it is demystifying economics for women. It is creating valuable, country-specific, quantitative and qualitative data on the effects of reform. It is facilitating ways for women to recognize their disempowerment in the context of global forces. It is also supporting participatory processes to create alternative policies at the local, national, and international level that promote women's rights and economic justice. It's an important step in confronting the economic system of reform and structural adjustment.

All these examples of feminist research, strategy, and advocacy C critically analyzing economic theories, monitoring the World Bank, creating women's budgets at the national level, encouraging the development of corporate codes of conduct C clearly illustrate that feminists are working at many levels to promote equality and women's empowerment.

But has any of this work had an impact? The answer is YES.

Mainstream economists are beginning to take feminist economic theory seriously. In 1995 an entire issue of the prestigious journal *World Development* was devoted to gender and macroeconomics. Institutions like the World Bank no longer see women as passive recipients of development but as active agents of social, political, and economic change. Gender equality has become a development goal in and of itself. Companies like the Gap or Liz Claiborne recognize that women's activism can change the way consumers see their products. More women than ever before are taking on economic policies and institutions, organizing in the workplace, in their communities, at the national and international level to stand up against oppression and subordination.

So, can feminists transform development?

Yes, in time.

Because two things are essential if development is to expand people's choices and guarantee their human rights. First, the global economic system must change. That is our long-term goal. Second, processes of change have to explicitly recognize gender imbalances to ensure that all people benefit from development.

In the words of Indian feminist economist Gita Sen, this means:

...recognizing that women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the care of human beings, and therefore between economic growth and human development. They are workers in both spheres B those most responsible and therefore with most at stake, those who suffer the most when the two spheres meet at cross purposes, and those most sensitive to the need for better integration of the two (as cited in Williams, 1997).

In my view, though, feminist research and activism, in order to take on the immense challenge before us, has to DEEPEN its impact, EXPAND its approach, and STRENGTHEN its alliances.

To deepen its impact, feminism must work to transform institutions -the entrenched structures of organizations. As we have learned, the single layer approach doesn't work. Efforts to change policies cannot simply focus on policy development or training. They also need to emphasize organizational cultures, rules, procedures, budgets, and practices.

Let's look at international development. The limited ability of large development agencies to improve women's rights has much to do with organizational cultures and practices. Development agencies use top down approaches, when participatory ones are needed. Staff are often evaluated on the management and timely dispersal of funds, rather than the impact of their work on women's lives. Implicitly, gender is perceived as a soft and secondary issue.

Deepening our impact means exposing and challenging vested interests and power structures C the historically rooted culture, principles, rules, and procedures that underlie an organization. Simply adding women into existing structures is not sufficient.

In terms of expanding our approach, we need to be more multidisciplinary and holistic. Development needs to reduce the dominance of economics, or else economic growth will always supersede human welfare. Development objectives need to be informed by human rights, ecology, political science, anthropology, cultural studies, and so on.

Achieving human rights has particular resonance for development. International human rights law stipulates that human rights are universal and indivisible. Indivisible means that you cannot separate economic, social, and cultural rights from civil or political rights. In other words, if we win the right to vote, but have no food, then we do not enjoy basic, human rights. Third World women were the first to express this as a direct challenge to western liberal democracies that still give priority to civil and political rights.

Finally alliances need to be strengthened between women -north and south, east and west, rich and poor. The voices of poor Southern women, in particular, need space and legitimacy. The practice of universalizing the experiences of white middle class women, who dominate the international arena, has marginalized women in the South.

For all you postmodernists out there, this is the postmodern challenge! We must be respectful of one another, taking care not to misrepresent the diverse positions of different women.

We must be careful not to collapse our complex, multiple social identities into a simplistic notion of one common gender identity or interest.

We cannot assume sisterhood on the basis of a common sex. Instead we must build coalitions that foster diversity and celebrate difference.

The tensions that exist within international feminism need to be acknowledged and confronted.

The romantic notion of global sisterhood can be replaced with strategic sisterhood.

In closing, I hope I have illustrated how the global economy is providing new and complex challenges to the pursuit of equality and human development. Globalization is the economic development model of this decade, and like most previous models of development it does not account for human differences in access to entitlements or power. The problems, of course, are easier to name than their solutions. That is why I have tried to go beyond the "paralysis of analysis" by exploring ways in which women are responding to the new global reality.

If you remember only three things from my talk tonight, remember these: economics is not objective; gender is never absent; and feminism is alive and well.

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