



Strategic Partners for New Economic and Social Directions

A Concept Paper

Prepared by the Global Women's Project, Center of Concern

The changing economic and social environment in the United States, driven by global economic integration and domestic economic liberalization, demands that the work for economic and social justice for all citizens be rethought and reorganized. For too long there has been a disconnect between the work of people at the local level and the work of organizations at the national level. This disconnect has hampered progress at all levels – making it more difficult to create new directions in our economic and social life.

The process of globalization and global economic integration is both driving and exposing the increasing level of interconnection among people in the U.S. and across the globe. The concerns discussed at the dinner table - dismal job prospects, environment damage, deepening poverty in the face of growing wealth both in the U.S. and abroad, and increasing immigration – are not issues families and communities confront alone. Rather, they are concerns that are similarly shared in localities across the U.S. and in the far reaches of the globe. We are living through an historic period of extraordinary change, confronting new challenges which demand innovative and visionary thinking on all levels.

Over the past decade we in the U.S. have witnessed precarious employment, wage stagnation, the shrinking of the middle class, expansion of the working poor, the slow death of rural America, rising national debt and budget and trade deficits, cut backs in spending on the social needs of our citizens – simply put, people are working harder than ever and barely keeping their heads above water. In the wider picture, we are witnessing, increased internal and external migration as people move in search of jobs; economic and social fallout as the social contracts forged between the government and its citizens over the past 70 years are dismantled: The New Deal, the War on Poverty, the Great Society, Affirmative Action and the long-held partnerships between business and labor. These are not problems of individuals, they are growing social and economic problems affecting many individuals, families and communities. The progress made toward racial, gender and class equality in the 60s and 70s has stagnated and in many cases regressed. The devastation of Hurricane Katrina exposed the entrenched racial and gender inequalities and unconscionable levels of poverty and marginalization which plague many people and communities in the U.S.

The time demands that we seek new directions for our economic and social policies and new strategies in how we approach our work.

Strategic Partners

To this end the Engendering Economic and Social Justice Project of the Center of Concern seeks to develop strategic partnerships with local and regional community-based groups working on local issues in order to more effectively work for economic and social change at the community, national and now global levels. We envision these partnerships as a means to collaborate in research and analysis of key problems at the local level in order to identify their linkages to policy decisions at the national and global levels, and situate them within the context of similar experiences in the U.S. and abroad - thereby developing a more comprehensive view

of the dynamics currently at work in our world.

We have also established partnerships with feminist economists who will be doing parallel studies on the impact of trade and economic liberalization on the U.S. We anticipate that these two different avenues of research will be mutually enriching as we seek to understand the U.S. reality and create alternatives.

From this shared analysis the partnership would foster debate and dialogue on alternative policies at the local, national and global levels to be crafted into shared advocacy positions. These positions would be distributed across our constituencies through various forms of communication, such as a quarterly e-bulletin, websites and blogs. These advocacy positions would also be used in dialogues with decision-makers at the local level, the U.S. Congressional level, with the appropriate governmental departments and within international social movements.

In addition we propose that popular education materials be developed to be shared across our constituencies and beyond so we can foster movement building toward a more just economic and social contract between the government and its people that promotes a sustainable economic and social development for all which advances gender, racial and class equality.

Our priorities in seeking strategic partners include groups that share our values on women's equality, racial and ethnic justice, human rights, sustainable livelihoods for all people and environmental sustainability.

Process

In pursuing this goal we propose the following process:

1. Identifying partners through mutual dialogue
2. Mutual planning in identifying the key local issues
3. Mutual agreement on the research and analysis agenda, process and responsibilities
4. Process of dialogue and debate in identifying alternative policies
5. Joint development of advocacy positions
6. Joint development of popular education materials

National Consultation

A national consultation to chart future directions is also planned. Participants in the consultation will include our strategic partners, the feminist economists, members of the U.S. Gender and Trade Network and other key players in this process. This Consultation is tentatively scheduled for June 25-26, 2007 immediately before the U.S. Social Forum to be held in Atlanta. We are also exploring opportunities for an international consultation or an event at an existing international conference to share U.S. experiences and to learn from our global colleagues.