

Center of Concern



...catalyst for economic and social justice

FROM WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT TO GENDER AND TRADE THE HISTORY OF THE GLOBAL WOMEN'S PROJECT

This article presents an historical overview of the Center of Concern's Global Women's Project, which was founded in 1974, in part, as a focal point for the Center's participation in the United Nations International Women's Year and the First UN Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975. Since then the Women's Project has been shaped by women's evolving consciousness and agenda through four World Conferences and beyond: Mexico, 1975; Copenhagen, 1980; Nairobi, 1985; and Beijing, 1995.

These years witnessed the increasing mobilization of women worldwide and their growing political presence and power, not only at women's conferences, but also throughout the UN system and in national political arenas. These decades also witnessed an evolving and deepening of the focus and critique women were bringing to economic issues. The women's economic agenda evolved from a WID (Women in Development) approach to GAD (Gender and Development) to mainstreaming gender in all policies and programs to an emphasis on empowerment and Human Rights. The focus of analysis expanded to include not only local and national issues but also global systemic issues. The expansion followed the realization that the local WID programs, such as income generation, not only did not move women out of poverty, but they often resulted in more work with little reward because the negative impact of macro-economic developments wiped out any advances women were making. This evolution of foci and agenda charts developments in women's analysis of their social and economic experiences and their efforts to address the inequities embedded in that experience both in the South and in the North. The evolution of the Center's Global Women's Project has followed this trajectory.

FROM WID TO GAD AND BEYOND

The shift from WID to GAD was particularly important because it transformed the women's agenda. The WID agenda focused on two main goals: to generate discussions and research on the role of women in development, and to institutionalize a women's focus within development agencies and governments with the mandate to integrate women into development processes.¹ The WID solution, integrating women into the development process, did not question the kind of development that was being fostered by the donor nations from the industrialized North. Furthermore, WID focused on women and generally ignored the consequences of different social realities, that is, the gendered worlds of women and men.

The GAD approach uses gender, rather than women, as an analytical category to understand how economic, political, social and cultural systems affect women and men differently. Gender is understood as the social roles, expectations and responsibilities assigned to women and men because of their biological differences. It is an ideological and cultural construct that shapes women's and men's realities.

The GAD approach signals three important departures from WID. First, it identifies the unequal power relations between women and men. Second, it reexamines all social, political and economic structures and development policies from the perspective of the gender differentials. And third, it recognizes that achieving gender equality and equity will demand "transformative" change in gender relations from household to global.

At the household level the gendered division of labor traditionally defines women's role primarily as family maintenance. This work is unpaid, taken for granted and invisible in economic terms, but has significant impact on the quality of women's lives and well-being. For example, when women assume paid work, they also assume the "double work day," paid and unpaid. The invisibility of women's unpaid work remains a critical issue in national and international macro policy. For example, the application of IMF and World Bank stabilization and structural adjustment policies (SAPs) caused many countries to cut back on government sponsored or subsidized social services. Women bear the burden when public sector services switch to the household thereby increasing the burden of unpaid work on their already stretched energy and resources. Based on this analysis, women and pro-equality development practitioners advocated mainstreaming gender analysis into all policy and programming both in design and impact assessment. Gender mainstreaming was formally adopted as a transformative strategy at the Beijing Conference.²

Beyond GAD and gender mainstreaming, women today are demanding the full exercise of their human rights and are developing a rights-based approach to economic policy. In the June 2000 special edition of *World Development*, Diane Elson and Nilufer Cagatay advocate "a rights-based approach to economic policy which aims directly at strengthening the realization of human rights, which include social, economic and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights. Such an approach goes beyond viewing gender concerns as primarily instrumental to growth, as is sometimes the case, because it recognizes women's agency and their rights and obligations as citizens."³ This approach clearly illustrates a profound political shift that became evident at the Fourth World Conference on Women, where women no longer focused on a narrow range of so-called women's economic and social issues but were demanding voice in all arenas of economic and social policy making.

SHIFT TO MACROECONOMICS

By the early 1980's, the impacts on women of the IMF and World Bank's stabilization and structural adjustment policies (SAPs) were becoming evident.⁴ It was clear that the WID solutions to women's poverty, such as credit availability, land reform, training and education were inadequate to address the macro policies that were negating any progress at the local and national level. Feminist economists began the task of unmasking the so-called gender-neutral macroeconomic policies in stabilization and structural adjustment packages. This work continues as new macro economic policies have come on the agenda, such as trade and investment.

The conceptual framework for new gender-sensitive approaches to macroeconomic analysis is neatly summarized in the *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*:

Although social institutions may not be intrinsically gendered themselves, they bear and transmit gender biases. Being socially constructed institutions, "free markets" also reflect and reinforce gender inequalities.

The cost of reproducing and maintaining the labor force in a given society remains invisible, as long as the scope of economic activity does not include unpaid "reproductive" labor. Thus unpaid work needs to be made visible to include unpaid reproductive labor.

Gender relations play an important role in the division of labor, the distribution of work, income, wealth and productive inputs with important macroeconomic implications. By extension, economic behavior is also gendered.⁵

During the late 1980s, the Center's Global Women's Project facilitated the founding of Alt-WID, a coalition of Washington, DC-based women working on economic issues. The name signifies the shift in the global women's economic agenda from WID to Alternatives to WID. The coalition applied the analysis of structural adjustment policies to the U.S. reality in the publication "Reaganomics: Structural Adjustment U.S. Style." This ground-breaking study argued that the economic policies driving the changes Ronald Reagan was introducing in the U.S. setting were essentially the same policies the IMF and the World Bank were propagating overseas. Though the settings were significantly different, the negative results were similar for women and communities in poverty both South and North. The study was a preliminary analysis of the process of economic integration that is shaping globalization today.

As a response to this analysis, the Global Women's Project and Alt-WID also began working through several structures of collaboration with women from the North and the Global South to address the macroeconomic issues that were impoverishing women everywhere. This work carried through the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995.

GENDER AND TRADE

The WTO was inaugurated in 1995, the same year as the Beijing Conference. SAPs were the predominant macroeconomic issue at the conference, but beyond that, little attention was given to the process of growing economic integration, which is at the center of globalization. Nor was there much awareness of the relationship between SAPs and global economic integration.

However, in reexamining SAPs from the point of view of trade, it is clear that one of the goals of SAPs reforms was to prepare countries' economies for the increasing liberalization of trade and investment fostered by the WTO and its most powerful players, the Quad (Canada, EU, Japan and the U.S.). As liberalization has progressed, the gaps between the rich and the poor both within and among nations have widened. We have also witnessed the Asian financial crisis with its contagion effect that virtually wiped out years of progress for people in Thailand, Korea and Indonesia. South Korean studies showed that women suffered the greatest setbacks during this crisis, as they were the first to lose jobs and security due to traditional discriminations and social role expectations. Furthermore, the prescriptions to relieve the Asian crisis were built on the traditional SAPs model that continues to shift the burden of social responsibilities onto the household and women. Clearly the economic model is not working.

Liberalized trade and investment are relatively new to the women's economic agenda. Feminist economists and the NGO community have only begun to address the issues since 1995 when the WTO came into existence as the successor to the GATT (Generalized Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). Since the First Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Singapore, 1996, women have been actively engaged in bringing a gender perspective into trade policy at the WTO, and at regional and country levels. The task is formidable because trade economists and negotiators consider trade and investment gender neutral, and because the major NGO groups addressing trade and investment issues, such as organized labor, environmental groups and many Southern NGOs, generally do not have a gender analysis.

The new economic environment calls for women to organize in new, collaborative ways. Out of this reality, the International Gender and Trade Network was born at a Strategic Planning Seminar in 1999, co-sponsored by the Center of Concern and DAWN Caribbean. The agenda of the Network is to

work toward transforming trade and investment policy at the global and regional levels through gender-sensitive research, advocacy and trade literacy work. The long-range goal is to engage the Global Women's Movement participants in trade discourse and trade policy development.

LOCAL GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

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

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 partnerships in collaboration with the International Gender and Trade Network, fosters debate and dialogue on alternative policies at the local, national and global levels to be crafted into shared advocacy positions.

TRANSFORMED POLICIES

Women and women's organizations are advocating a new approach to economic policy because they know the failures of the current models from their own experiences. They are critical of macroeconomic policies that focus on market-based criteria, with an over riding emphasis on stabilization and a diminished role for the state. This macro approach identifies social policy concerns primarily as a "safety net" when and where market-driven policies fail. Women are seeking to put social policies at the center of economic policies. Putting social policies at the center of economic policies would change the criteria for judging effectiveness. The soundness of economic policies would not be based on market criteria, per se, but in terms of whether they ultimately succeed in bringing societies to achieving social justice. "Thus, desired social outcomes such as distributive justice, equity, provisioning of needs for all, freedom from poverty and discrimination, social inclusion, development of human capabilities become the ultimate goals of policy-making, including macroeconomic policy-making."⁶ The goal is to mainstream social policies into economic policies. This is the economic agenda for women in the 21st century: the agenda that the Center's Global Women's Project will be pursuing in collaboration with the domestic strategic partners and the International Gender and Trade Network.

¹ Razavi Shahrashoub and Carol Miller. *From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse*. UNRISD. Geneva, 1995, p. 12.

² For further discussion of the WID to GAD shift see *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work*. United Nations Publications, New York, 1999.

³ Grown, Caren, Diane Elson and Nilufer Cagatay. "Introduction." *World Development*. Vol. 28, No. 7 (July 2000), p. 1154.

⁴ Stabilization and Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) are a series of economic reforms demanded by the World Bank and the IMF when a country either seeks a new loan or wants to reschedule an existing loan. Typically, these reforms include anti-inflation measures, currency devaluation, fiscal discipline in the form of budget reductions, privatization, and export directed growth. Women bear the burden of SAPs when government services and support systems are switched from the public sector to the household.

⁵ *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women In Development*. UN Publications, New York. p. 60.

⁶ Elson, Diane and Nilufer Cagatay. "The Social Content of Macroeconomic Policies." *World Development*, July 2000, p. 1348.