



# **The Impact of the global economic crisis on women and women's human rights across regions**

By Nerea Craviotto  
2010 Edition

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tional, feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.

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## Preamble

In early 2010, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) launched a series entitled "The Impact of the Crisis on Women's Rights<sup>1</sup>." Written by women's rights experts, activists and gender equality advocates, the series provides a regional/sub-regional analysis of the impact of the financial and economic crisis on women's human rights. The series has since been updated to reflect the current contexts in the regions.

The aim of this series—and indeed this cross-regional update—is to

contribute to the debate on the origins, impacts and responses to the crisis from a feminist perspective. In order to develop responses to the crisis that are grounded in the lived experiences of women affected by the crisis across the globe, we highlight the impacts across and within regions. Almost 3 years into the current systemic crisis, the disproportionate impact on particular women, the intense challenges women face in maintaining livelihoods and the erosion of women's human rights continue.

## Background

The present financial and economic crises are intertwined with crises of food, energy, water, the environment, work and care, underscoring the systemic nature of the crisis. The crisis has affected not only economic life, but also the political and social institutions of society; a reality evident throughout all of the updated regional analyses. As the series has shown, while crises are far from new – indeed, much of the East and South have been in crisis for the past

three decades – the current financial crisis has further aggravated these existing crises and, as a result, threatened the meager development gains of the last ten years<sup>2</sup>.

The multiple and interlinked crises indicate that unregulated markets have failed to allocate resources – including wealth – in a just and equitable manner and have proven to be economically, socially and ecologically unsustainable. The systemic crisis reveals

1 - <http://www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-Initiatives/IDeA/Systemic-Crisis/Responses-to-the-Crisis-Global-institutions-and-official-processes/AWID-s-Response-to-the-Crisis/Briefs-The-Impact-of-the-crisis-on-Women>.

2 - Raaber, N. (2010). *Brief 11: The Impact of the Crisis on Women: Main Trends across Regions*. AWID: Toronto, Canada. Available in: [www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-Initiatives/IDeA/Systemic-Crisis/Responses-to-the-Crisis-Global-institutions-and-official-processes/AWID-s-Response-to-the-Crisis/Briefs-The-Impact-of-the-crisis-on-Women](http://www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-Initiatives/IDeA/Systemic-Crisis/Responses-to-the-Crisis-Global-institutions-and-official-processes/AWID-s-Response-to-the-Crisis/Briefs-The-Impact-of-the-crisis-on-Women)

that the main driver of capitalist development – returns on investment – requires exponential growth and exponential growth on returns. This drive toward exponential growth urged economic agents to systematically ignore limits to growth: i) in the economic area, growth over the last decade has been fueled by an unsustainable reliance on cheap credit (in many developed countries) – tipping off a global economic crisis; ii) the physical conditions of workers, their social reproduction and livelihoods have been ignored, resulting in exploitation and poverty; iii) resource scarcity and natural regeneration processes have also been ignored, resulting in environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity and climate change; and iv) in the financial markets, speculation, betting and bubbles have gone beyond the realm of real money into a fantasy world<sup>3</sup>.

As Naomi Klein aptly notes, crises have been utilized, in both the past and in the present, to prepare the ground for the introduction of radical “free market” reforms, because “shocked societies often give up things they would otherwise fiercely protect<sup>4</sup>.” AWID’s regional analyses echo this point. Comprehensive and holistic responses (that address the systemic nature of the crisis) have been absent from the discussion in most places and certainly from action – and those least responsible for the crisis suffer the most from this dearth. Responses have failed to adequately support the poor (the majority of whom are women), workers (in both the private and public sectors – as well as in the informal arena), the self-employed and small and medium size enterprises. As J. Petras<sup>5</sup> notes and the Financial Times on August 10, 2010 (p.7) reiterates, corporate prof-

its have shot up between 20% to over 100% during the first quarter of 2010 thanks to state measures to counter recessions, such as tax exemptions, subsidies, low/no interest loans from local, state and/or national governments as well as the freedom to shed millions of jobs and secure kick backs from trade unions (where they exist).

Women across regions (in both developed and developing countries) have been directly affected by this crisis in unique ways, depending on, among other factors, their location within social groups and economic sectors and the existence (or lack thereof) of social safety nets. The characteristics of each country in relation to, for example, dependence on remittances, trade, levels of foreign direct investment and overseas development aid also shape the impact of the crisis on women<sup>6</sup>.

## Main trends across regions

### The impact of the crisis on decent work, the care economy and rising poverty

In the face of the economic downturn, governments across all regions AWID examined have had serious difficulties in generating decent employment and preventing a deepening of poverty. This has been particularly true for women and youths. For example, in Eastern and Southern African countries, due to the contraction of export markets, many women workers in export processing zones continue to lose their jobs. Considering the lack of social protection mechanisms, this situation often results in a descent into poverty and destitution – from unem-

ployment to homelessness.

In Western Europe, reports on the working poor show that although there are differences in unemployment levels between northern and southern Europe, the risk of poverty is increasing across the board, particularly among female-headed households and within southern Europe, where gender gaps are greatest and social protection is less extensive (than in northern Europe). In addition, according to the 2009 European Commission’s (EC) report on unemployment<sup>7</sup>, in September 2009 women’s unemployment in the EU was at 9%

(higher, though, in southern EU countries). In 2010 female unemployment has increased faster than men’s unemployment in at least 12 EU countries. Moreover, as women’s jobs in many Western European countries are concentrated in the public sector, the EC predicts women will be disproportionately affected by job losses due to ongoing budget cuts in the public sector (especially, in education and healthcare, traditionally feminized labor sectors). Opportunities to be re-employed have also diminished. For those workers who have managed to maintain their jobs, wages have been cut (in both the public and private sector), work benefits have been reduced and working hours have increased. Thus, jobs that previously provided a “middle class” life are now providing only subsistence living. Incomes that were previously at subsistence

3 - Wichterich, C. (2010). Downloading risks and costs: A feminist perspective of the global multiple crisis. WIDE: Brussels, Belgium. Available in: [www.wide-network.org](http://www.wide-network.org) (Corner on Financial Crisis).

4 - Klein, N. (2007). The shock doctrine. Penguin Books: London, England, p. 17.

5 - Petras, J. (2010). While progressives and leftists write about the “crises of capitalism”, manufacturers, petroleum companies, bankers and most other major corporations on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific coast are chuckling all the way to the bank. Available in: <http://www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-Initiatives/IDeA/Systemic-Crisis/Impact-of-the-Crisis-In-the-News/In-depth-Analysis/What-Crisis-Profits-Soar!>

6 - See footnote 2.

7 - European Commission (2008). Eurostat Key Figures on Europe 2009 Edition. EC: Brussels, Belgium. Available in: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-EI-08-001/EN/KS-EI-08-001-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-EI-08-001/EN/KS-EI-08-001-EN.PDF)

level, have, in effect, become subsistence. Yet, people have had to accept these cuts in order to keep a job.

In Eastern Europe, the major cause of poverty continues to be unemployment and low-paid/insecure jobs. Between 2007 and 2009, the unemployment rates for the region (exempting the EU-10) rose from 8.3% to 10.3%; for women, unemployment rates rose from 8.1% to 9.8% (for the same period)<sup>8</sup>. Households living below the national poverty line have exhausted their coping strategies (i.e. asking for support from extended family, different generations and/or different families living together and pooling their income sources to pay for basic necessities, migration), because rising prices, wage and pension cuts and lack of job opportunities are happening everywhere. Female-headed households have been hit particularly hard. In some Eastern European countries (such as Poland), the state has frozen income thresholds for social protection allowances, resulting in a larger number of poor people not receiving the already meager social security payments (the average monthly allowance is currently at 25 zlotys, equivalent to 6.25 euros). Women, who constitute the majority of welfare recipients, have been the most affected by this measure. Other state measures include cuts in public social services and, as noted above, cuts in public sector wages, the latter affecting women - who constitute 70% of the public sector labor force in, for example, Poland and Latvia - disproportionately.

Central Asia is facing similar problems, particularly around unemployment, which has been one of the main consequences of the global economic crisis. In 30% of households in Tajikistan, only half of household members who could be employed have a job. In Kazakhstan, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2009, the number of unemployed females increased by approxi-

mately 31.4%. Similarly, in Kyrgyzstan, many women in the garment sector lost their jobs (they represent 90% of the labor force in this sector) due to declining demand related not only to the economic crisis, but also to political instability in neighboring countries (notably Kazakhstan). In addition, across the region, women face lower wages (i.e. in Kazakhstan, women make 62 cents to every dollar a man makes) and higher levels of discrimination in the labor market, increasing the vulnerability of households, particularly those that are female-led. Considering the lack of state initiatives to protect households in Central Asian countries, many households have had to reduce their basic consumption and/or incur debt in order to cope with the financial situation,

In most Asian countries, the high dependence on international trade makes volatility in global exports particularly pernicious, with direct and indirect effects on employment: access to employment has suffered (job losses affecting women in certain sectors disproportionately); decline in real wages and income from self-employment (women particularly affected here, as well); and access to basic services - such as healthcare and education - has been compromised further. In addition, the pressure on employers to compete in an increasingly hostile environment is often associated with attempts to reduce labor costs by driving down wages and forcing remaining workers to work longer hours. Women, often less unionized, are assigned to lower paying and more "flexible" labor activities. Faced with decreased job opportunities, many women workers across the region have turned to home-based subcontracting activities, or work in very small units, often on a piece-rate basis, with low wages and without non-wage benefits. Agriculture has also faced challenges in many parts of the region, yet it continues to

### BOX 1:

In Madagascar, an export factory laid off 2,000 workers, a trend we have seen with many other export oriented jobs. The majority of the workers were women who, globally, constitute more than 70% of the labor force in export processing zones. Instead of facilitating the support that was promised to the retrenched workers, the transitional government of Madagascar instructed the armed forces to throw teargas at the workers who came to the factory to get their severance pay, which was denied by the company on the grounds that they were not technically entitled to such benefit (Midi Madagasikara, 21 April 2010).

- AWID Eastern and Southern Africa regional analysis.

### BOX 2:

Sewing workshops in Kyrgyzstan do not provide social protection for their workers (the majority of whom are women). Working hours are often at least 12 hours/day and, at times, workers work non-stop, with only a few hours sleep inside the workshop. When the workshops are closed, workers are not paid any salary or allowances and they don't receive any social insurance. Between 2008-2010, 20% of women working in this sector in Kyrgyzstan lost their job.

- AWID Central Asia regional analysis.

8 - Jansen, M. and Uexkull (von), E. (2010). Trade and Employment in Global Crisis. ILO: Geneva, Switzerland. Available in: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_141911.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_141911.pdf)



employ a large share of workers, especially women workers.

Given the specific labor structure of the Pacific region (a very small formal employment sector), the global economic crisis has affected primarily the informal and subsistence sectors. Therefore, women have been significantly affected by declining incomes due to falling prices of goods and services, longer working hours and increased stress. In rural and remote island communities, where there are limited earning opportunities, tourism is an important industry for women. This sector has been seriously hit by both the climate and ecological crisis and the economic and financial crisis (which are intimately intertwined). The small garment sector present in the region, staffed primarily by women, has seen a decline in exports, which has led to job cuts, wage cuts and shorter working hours for those that kept their jobs. According to 2009 UNDP figures<sup>9</sup>, since the rise in food prices in 2008, real incomes of the poorest households in Pacific island countries have fallen by at least 10% and one-third of the population is living at or below the national poverty line; in Papua New Guinea, the figures are much higher.

In Latin America, thus far, the effects of the global economic crisis have been moderate compared to other regions in the world. However, data available for 2009 show that the effects of the crisis have varied between countries and sub-regions, with some countries registering higher levels of growth, while others faced declines and, in some cases, even considerable ones. Generally speaking, the region has experienced a relative increase in unemployment and informality, as well as a rise in poverty and vulnerability. States across the region have faced difficul-

ties in maintaining progressive social spending, which has compromised livelihoods and the survival households, particularly for the poorest households. In terms of the crisis's impact on the labor sector, the decline in male employment has often resulted in higher female labor market participation. It is important to note that when seeking employment, women are often pushed to look only in the informal sector - due to the lack of jobs in the formal sector and/or the flexibility in terms of schedules informal sector jobs often offer. Responding to the need to reduce the uncertainty caused by household financial instability, this behavior has been observed quite heavily within lower income social groups and by poor female-headed households. However, informal jobs tend to be more precarious and those occupying them often lack access to basic social services.

Within the US, many have characterized the recent crisis as a "mancession" (due to the massive slowdowns in male-dominated sectors such as construction, financial services, and manufacturing). However, such analysis ignores the crucial care functions that many women provide to the economy and discounts the impact of the crisis on certain vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, minorities, and certain age demographics. While men accounted for most of the "employed-to-unemployed" flows during the current recession, females comprise most of the "employed-to-not in the labor force" flows, i.e. women are not simply moving into job searches when becoming unemployed, but are exiting the job market entirely. While the overall unemployment rate was slightly lower - at 9.6% - in the Fall of 2010 than its peak a few months before, the rate, in fact, disguises several concerning issues. For example, in 2010, the unemployment

### BOX 3:

Kristina, Poland, 54 years old, worker of Glassworks:

"World Bank studies for the Eastern Europe region admit existing coping strategies have been exhausted. Thus continuing the implementation of neoliberal anti-crisis policies will kill people already ravished by war and poverty. The authorities do not allow people in terminal pain to die, but the measures they are implementing make people die. If this is not social euthanasia, what is then?"

*Charkiewicz, E. (2009). Women, poverty and financial crisis in Krosno. Feminist Think Tank research report.*

rate of Latina workers and African American women was 11.7% and 12.7%, respectively; for single mothers, it was at 12.4%. Indeed, as noted in the JASS blog, economic and racial inequalities are inseparable from gender inequality and deeply structural - therefore, any progressive economic project must put racial justice at the center<sup>10</sup>. It is important to underscore that women face higher levels of poverty at all skill and education levels as well as ages, due to occupation clustering, unpaid work burdens and the more tenuous connection to the labor market during childbearing years. Poor women, minorities and certain age demographics are also often disproportionately affected by public service cuts, which are currently happening in many states across the US.

AWID's regional analyses showed that in those countries where the responsibility for social reproduction was shared between the household and the state (the state provided child-care facilities, education, healthcare, social security), this responsibility is now shifting more and more to households, increasing women's time burden

9 - UNDP Pacific Centre. (2009b). Annual Report 2009. UNDP: Suva, Fiji. Available in: [www.undppc.org.fj/\\_resources/article/files/Pacific%20Centre%202009%20Annual%20Report.pdf](http://www.undppc.org.fj/_resources/article/files/Pacific%20Centre%202009%20Annual%20Report.pdf)

10 - <http://www.jassblog.org/2010/08/putting-gender-justice-into-alternative.html>

in the daily provisioning, care and maintenance of their families. Indeed, the crisis is being used as an excuse to privatize public services and install fees and/or cut public spending on crucial social services. The household – and particularly women – acts as a socio-economic buffer in times of crisis, often absorbing these responsibilities. For example, as household in-

comes decline and access to public services (particularly to healthcare, sanitation and education) becomes increasingly difficult, families are forced to adopt different survival strategies, including household labor for the provisioning of basic needs and other strategies to soothe consumption patterns. These tasks are performed primarily by women and girls.

## The food crisis

The economic and financial crisis has had detrimental effects on access to food, health care and education for the most vulnerable groups in society, in both urban and rural areas. The regional analyses have shown that several regions have faced food crises prior to and in parallel with the economic downturn (which has exacerbated food crises). In Eastern and Southern African countries, the food crisis is exacerbating and being exacerbated by the global economic/financial crisis. As managers of food security in households, women are particularly disadvantaged. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in Mozambique, where food riots took place in 2010, half of the country's poor already suffer from acute malnutrition. All the net food importing countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, including Mauritius, share the same situation.

In Eastern Europe, inflation and volatile exchange rates have increased the cost of living, leading to an added crisis in food security.

In Central Asian countries, common coping strategies in crisis-affected households related to food and nutrition include: reducing expenditure on food and changing consumption patterns to eat cheaper, less nutritious food; incurring debt; and taking on additional income-generating activities. For example, in Tajikistan, households have re-

duced their consumption by 20% during the crisis. In some provinces (such as Gorno-Badakhshan), 62% of households borrowed money for food, while in the capital, 67.2% of households ate meat infrequently. In Kyrgyzstan, households have also reduced their consumption of meat, leading to anemia, especially among poor women. In areas where water quality is poor, trends show people may start to cut back on buying water. In many cases these strategies lead to growing malnutrition and health deterioration.

In the Asian region, the agrarian crisis has contributed to the food crisis, with rising prices and declining food self-sufficiency. In addition, as household incomes are falling, access to food becomes more difficult. Coping strategies include reduced food choices for those with jobs, particularly a reduction in fish or meat, a further reduction of food for those without jobs, a reduction in food intake by parents vis à vis their children and deprivation of women and girls vis à vis male household members.

In the Pacific region, rising food costs mean that meager incomes are stretched more for less access to food, especially within rural households. A UNDP study expects poverty to continue to rise in the Pacific as a full recovery will take a long time<sup>11</sup>. The study estimates that 50,000 more people in the Pacific will be in poverty by the end of 2010, deepening the food crisis and the levels of food insecurity for many<sup>12</sup>.

### BOX 4:

The main market on the island of Rodrigues, Mauritius, is located at Port Mathurin. Many people live far away from the market and have to make long journeys in order to get there to sell their products. Six months ago, Casmir used to pay 40 Rps for a round trip bus ticket. Once rising fuel prices hit the remote island of Rodrigues, the ticket cost doubled, and she has to pay 80 Rps for the same trip. (...) Casmir made 800 Rps for selling her products, however as she explained “*I had two baskets. The lorry man charged me 40 Rps per basket. So I paid 160 Rps for my transportation each way and 30 Rps for the stall rental,*” says Casmir. *On the way back home I bought 1 kilogram of powdered milk for 150 Rps and 500 grams of dried meat for 120 Rps. In the end, after expenses, I was left with 180 Rps. Everything is more expensive now. Before I could afford to buy two baguettes of bread for 6 Rps. Now I can afford to buy only one, for 5 Rps.* Soaring food and fuel prices have had a negative impact on Casmir's livelihood. Her purchasing power has decreased dramatically, and at this point in time she cannot raise the prices of her products to compensate for higher food prices because of the fierce competition. As a result, her family has less food and is eating less.

IFAD (2010). *Rodrigues Island, Mauritius: Soaring food and fuel prices eat into poor people's livelihoods*: [http://www.rural-povertyportal.org/web/guest/country/voice/tags/mauritius/foodprices\\_mauritius](http://www.rural-povertyportal.org/web/guest/country/voice/tags/mauritius/foodprices_mauritius)

11 - See footnote 8.

12 - Asian Development Bank. (2010). Pacific Economic Monitoring report, February 2010. ADB: Manila, Philippines.

## Migration and remittances

As economies shrink, migrants have found it increasingly difficult to find and maintain decent work. In crises, as work diminishes, migrants – and particularly women migrants – face deteriorating, increasingly precarious work conditions, work longer hours for lower wages and often go undocumented or work in the informal economy.

Additionally, remittance flows, which comprise a significant portion of some developing countries' GDP, have fallen in the majority of the world. Decreased remittance levels and the impact of this on household-income in the origin country have been highlighted by several of the regional briefs, notably Eastern and Southern Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. These trends pose additional challenges

### BOX 5:

According to a UK governmental report released in 2009, half a million Polish migrants disappeared from labor market statistics; the assumption is that they have returned to a depressed labor market in Poland.

In the Pacific, the Asian Development Bank estimates an annual decline in remittances of about 20% in real terms in Tonga and in Samoa, where remittances previously comprised around 36% and 26% of their GDP, respectively. Remittances also fell in Kiribati and Tuvalu where 20% of seafarers lost their jobs in 2009 due to the global downturn. Pacific remittances were very much affected by the economic instability in Australia and New Zealand, major sources of employment for Pacific people.

- AWID Eastern Europe and Pacific regional analysis.

to the origin countries' economies, as highlighted by the Latin American regional analysis: on the one hand, when migrant workers decide to return back to the country of origin, it adds pressure to a labor market that is already shrinking; on the other, decreased remittances lowers household incomes

in the origin country, threatening the already fragile livelihoods of poor families.

Xenophobia has risen in certain areas (i.e. Western and Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, Asia and the US), posing a serious risk to migrants' safety.

## Violence against women: on the rise in times of crisis

In periods of crises, violence against women tends to increase, threatening livelihoods and eroding women's human rights, including the ability of women to participate fully and equally in society.

The Eastern and Southern African countries' regional analysis highlights that the already high

levels of violence against women have risen in Mozambique and in other countries where food riots erupted in 2008. Furthermore, the economic downturn triggered a familiar situation where women who have lost their financial independence are more likely to face domestic violence or be pushed into sexual exploitation or trafficking. In Western Europe, migrant women are often exposed to increased violence during crises. Since 2008, there has been an increase in reports of vio-

lence and abuse against migrant women, coupled with shrinking resources and fewer facilities that offer support. For example, migrant women themselves in the Netherlands and UK reported that migrant women (particularly undocumented migrant women) are losing domestic care jobs and, as a result, are being pushed toward even more invisible, undocumented and dangerous work.

Migrant women in Eastern Europe are also vulnerable to violence and

### BOX 6:

Marília Pugas, head doctor at the Manica Provincial Health Department, explains that the number of sex workers coming from Zimbabwe have increased in the past few years. This is the case of Mwamutara, a 32 year old Zimbabwean woman, who left a career as an administrative assistant at a

rope factory in Zimbabwe: "I came to Mozambique to sell sheets, but my friends convinced me to become a prostitute, because it's a very profitable business and can help you get through the financial crisis, so I accepted." Many Zimbabwean women, like Mwamutara, cross the border to Mozambique to escape the economic crisis and food shortag-

es in their home country, but a growing number of them end up having commercial sex to survive. These women are highly vulnerable to HIV, as the difference in price between sex with a condom (\$3) and unprotected sex (\$10) is quite stark.

- Adapted from IRIN PlusNews, 14 September 2010.



abuse by the police and/or their employers and social insecurity. In Asia, the regional analysis observed that as material conditions worsen, an increased inclination toward gender-based violence and domestic violence has emerged, based on higher numbers of reported cases of violence against women within and outside households, as well as greater insecurity of women in public spaces.

In the Pacific region, women continue to be sexually exploited – both commercially and in their homes – and suffer horrific violence, often justified by men on the basis of religious and customary beliefs about male ownership of and en-

titlements to women. Noted in the Pacific analysis, forced marriage of girls to pay debts between collectives, the burning of women believed to be witches, the physical and sexual exploitation of children who migrate from their homes to live with other families for schooling and the continuing practice of “bride price” in Melanesian nations remain examples of human rights violations perpetuated against women and girls.

Several of the regional analyses highlighted female sex work as a coping strategy to deal with economic difficulties. Box 6 highlights this pattern in Eastern and Southern Africa. Similarly, the regional

analysis from Western Europe draws attention to the expanding exploitation of local and immigrant women as sex workers. In Central Asian and South East Asian countries, like Kyrgyzstan or Thailand, shrinking opportunities for decent employment and high levels of poverty have led to increasing numbers of girls and young women from urban and rural areas entering the sex sector, with cases of under-aged girls supporting their families with their earnings. In the Pacific region, human trafficking related to sexual exploitation is identified as a significant problem; yet, little action has been taken by national governments in the region to counter these trends.

## Moving forward: recommendations from a gender equality and women's rights perspective

As has been noted by many women's rights organizations and others, the current crisis is not simply a financial or economic crisis; it is a systemic crisis – a symptom of a failed neo-liberal model of growth and development. Yet, responses to the crisis, decisions on economy and livelihoods and other governance issues – decisions that should be made in a democratic,

transparent and participatory manner – are being made by Ministries of Finance, the International Financial Institutions, business lobby groups and “expert” committees. Therefore, we are seeing a return to the status quo.

The impacts of this systemic crisis on women and their rights vary across time and place and

depend upon the diverse and specific realities of a given woman's context and circumstances. Addressing the areas of impact identified within this brief – categories that, in real life, are neither separate nor distinct – requires a clear vision of development grounded in human rights and gender equality, robust political will and a strong public policy response<sup>13</sup>.

## Responses and recommendations

Across regions, we have seen that governments, in response to the crisis, have used measures that have strengthened investors and businesses and reassured the market, while supporting livelihoods and the well-being of communities fell to the margins of economic policy. Increased budget deficits and growth in public debt are being used as an excuse to continue with neo-liberal public sector reforms and austerity measures, subordinating the well-being and human rights of women and communities to the well-being of the market and particular

sectors. This notion of “common sense” must be challenged.

Stimulus packages, recovery plans and global governance mechanisms should serve the well-being and financial stability of poor households (both in urban and rural areas), be gender sensitive and promote women's human rights. A more thorough gender analysis of the crisis, its impacts and responses is essential to protect gender equality gains and women's human rights – both of which are at heightened risk.

Responses should also integrate women in the decision-making processes, as well as the perspective of women's rights groups in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes.

Furthermore, responses should, at the minimum, invest in care, community-based services, education, healthcare; they must take into account the special needs of women small producers (for access to credit, inputs and market access, among others); they must also take into account the diversities among and between women (and men). Lastly, it is crucial to recognize and address the increased unpaid work burden of women – and its associated impact on women's human rights. Therefore, universal, well-financed and accountable systems of public service delivery are key to countering the intensification of already high levels of women's

13 - See footnote 2.

care burdens and unpaid work. The promotion of gender budgeting initiatives is also important.

In terms of movement building, it is extremely important for women's rights advocates to work together across borders to produce critiques of the causes and responses to the crisis that could, ultimately, support and produce a more gender sensitive response, that is in line with and promotes women's economic and social rights. Civil society organizations and international networks should continue struggling to change the global financial architecture and macro-economic governance, opening the space for democratic participation in decision-making and for alternatives to neoliberal policy prescriptions.

While devastating, the crisis provides an opportunity to promote an economic model that is grounded in human rights and is inclusive, accountable and sustainable. Women's rights activists, gender equality advocates and feminist economists should participate in its creation, ensuring a new development model that benefits all, including those that have historically been subject to discrimination.

## What's next? Critical questions and feminist alternatives

When compared to the first edition of this crisis series (done in 2009), the updated regional analyses – and the cross-regional synthesis – reveal that there has been a deepening/continuation of the crisis. Government interventions have focused on reassuring markets and certain sectors of the economy – often at the expense of communities' and individuals' human rights. Budget cuts and austerity measures – being implemented in many places – have resulted in reduction of vital public services and a further deepening of the crisis in decent work. The recommendations emerging from the updated briefs are similar (if not the same) as those the authors initially recommended, as the majority of government responses have not taken them onboard.

As we look forward and continue to struggle for change, justice and alternative economic policies/structures that serve the people, here are some questions that we hope will contribute to the dialogue:

- ♦ Across the regions, governments' responses to the crisis have failed the majority of people. How have responses impacted women and their rights in your country/region? What does a feminist response to the crisis look like from your perspective? What type of policies and legislation would support women's human rights?
- ♦ Have feminist and/or women's groups responded to the crisis in your region/sub-region? If so, in what way?
- ♦ Using the crisis as a springboard, is there space for an "alternative" feminist model of development? If so, what would a feminist development paradigm grounded in gender justice and human rights look like? Are there any concrete examples of alternative/feminist development practices in your country/region that you would like to share?
- ♦ Considering shifting geo-politics, where as feminists/women's human rights advocates do we push for alternative practices/policies? Which spaces (i.e. the UN, the G20, the International Financial Institutions, regional bodies, the Davos World Economic Forum, others?) are strategic?
- ♦ How do you see women's rights/feminist movements in terms of coordination, mobilization and capacity to respond to the crisis? What are the strengths? And the challenges? How do we overcome them? What needs to change?

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## Impacts of the Crisis on Women's Rights: Sub regional perspectives

New from AWID is this 2010 edition of the brief series: Impacts of the Crisis on Women's Rights: Sub regional perspectives. We are excited to present an update, by region, to the exceptional research conducted in 2009 on the impact of the global financial crisis on women's rights. This update provides relevant new data, testimonies, and voices from women activists on the ground. Each case presents an opportunity to unpack the in-depth challenges faced by different women in diverse contexts while examining possible policy solutions from a feminist perspective. This work takes us on a journey to help us think beyond the financial crisis and its implications, and start reflecting about the new world being created. At AWID we believe these studies contribute to building and supporting women's movements.

**Brief 1:** The impact of the crisis on women in Latin America  
By Alma Espino and Norma Sanchís

**Brief 2:** Impact of the global crisis on women in developing Asia — an update  
By Jayati Ghosh

**Brief 3:** Women of the Pacific and the global economic crisis  
By Karanina Sumeo

**Brief 4:** Impacts of the global economic and financial crisis on women in Central Asia  
By Nurgul Djanaeva

**Brief 5:** The Impact of the Deepening Economic Crisis on Women and Gender Equality in Western Europe  
By Wendy Harcourt and Lois Woestman

**Brief 6:** The Impact of the Crisis on Women in Eastern Europe  
By Eva Charkiewicz

**Brief 7:** The Global Economic Crisis and Gender Relations: The Greek Case  
By Lois Woestman

**Brief 8:** United States: The Continued Need for Social Sector Stimulus  
By Rania Antonopoulos and Taun Toay

**Brief 9:** The Impact of the Deepening Economic Crisis on Women in Eastern and Southern Africa  
By Zo Randriamaro

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