

# Diverse development models and strategies revisited

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### Editorial

Alejandra Scampini

As many women's rights and feminist groups have noted, we continue in a context of converging global crises. Economic and financial crises cannot be seen in isolation from the food, energy, water, environment, climate, human rights, and care crises. These interlocking crises are part of a failed development model: a model which, at its core, is largely gender blind, patriarchal, and indifferent to human rights, including women's rights.

Women have extensive experience in survival and resistance strategies to failed development models and the recurring crises these have caused. Over the past three years, AWID has been examining the impact of and responses to the systemic crisis from a feminist and women's rights perspective. This collection builds on that work to explore diverse alternative development visions—indeed alternative ways to organize economies.

The articles that follow do not presume to offer a comprehensive or a complete alternative model to the mainstream economic system. The aim is to share and promote critical analysis on a range of alternative visions and practices that progressive social movements and feminist groups are putting forward across the world. Given the difference in levels of fulfillment of basic rights across regions, struggles for changes in the development model are shaped in some cases by the need to achieve rights that are already at a higher level of fulfillment in other contexts.

We have reached out to key groups, pioneers, and in some cases the creators of the concepts covered in this series, to share their visions and

practices. These groups continue to work with, nuance, and adapt the concepts in alliance with others.

This work on feminist perspectives towards transforming economic power contributes to the dialogue, debate, and action on the crisis of the dominant development and economic model as well as sustainable ways forward that work for all people—women and men—and the planet.

We believe that unpacking, analyzing, and grappling with the very concept of development is a key pillar for thinking about social transformation of all kinds, and specifically in relation to transforming economic power.

At the 2012 AWID Forum and beyond we will continue to explore the specific realities of communities and peoples who are, in their day to day life, struggling to overcome poverty, inequality, and injustice. We will also hear stories of wisdom, resistance, and diverse models of “another form of development.” Debates around alternative models of development and alternative models to development have been happening in different ways in different places for decades—and the discussions continue.

This compilation of articles contributes to these ongoing debates and provokes further thinking on other ways to think about development and organization of the economy. These pieces highlight the need to unpack the understanding that development (in both theory and practice) is neither a rigid nor monolithic concept—but rather, an economic, social, political, and cultural process that people can recreate, reformulate, and rethink in their own ways and realities.

# Latin America

## An Overview

By Alma Espino and  
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Latin America

### Latin America

#### An Overview

#### Food Sovereignty

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# The Challenges of Development: Alternatives under Construction in Latin America

In Latin America, particularly after the failure and subsequent questioning and delegitimizing of neoliberal politics that has taken place since the beginning of the 2000s, the search for new paths is evident within social movements and political forces. Without disregarding the centrality of orthodox economic politics, a new construction of ideas is emerging in the periphery, not without weaknesses and contradictions. Feminist proposals share much of this questioning and include a gender perspective that cross-cuts the analysis of family, social environment and macro policies. A dialogue is underway, merging different currents of thought that share several meeting points, resulting in mutual enrichment and possible alliances, and setting up a fertile ground to challenge the hierarchical and unequal gender order.

## Searching for New Paths

In Latin America, as a result of historical frustrations in the region, new discourses and policies have emerged in the past years, which are a sign of proposals for alternative development. New perspectives are being translated into policies and regulations that go beyond, but take into account, the relative incidence of the human development paradigm—prioritizing the quality of life and the enrichment of human potentials.

These debates have emerged while a series of inter-related crises have become visible: global economic recession, climate change, food crisis, and crisis of care systems. The new proposals nourish themselves with different trends that are a critical response to mainstream thinking and policies in the context of the significant transformations in economies and societies during the 1980s and 1990s; they point out the need to build development models that include and take into account the demands and proposals of social movements, among which the women's movements also have an ongoing presence. Certainly, new actors are visible and the voices are diverse. Along with the progressive and more traditional left perspectives, new perspectives appear, including the visions of aboriginal peoples, peasant and small rural production sectors, cooperative production urban sectors, and undoubtedly also from feminism.

Some of these proposals are outlined here and are explained in more detail in the articles in this collection.

## Buen Vivir

Buen Vivir is a body of ideas that outlines a vision of life and the economy of nations on the basis of a set of principles of the indigenous Andean cosmovision. These ideas were incorporated in the Constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. In the first case, Buen Vivir, based upon a Quechua definition, *sumak kawsay*, which means living well, good life, and a life not better or worse than others' lives but good for those who live it and free from ambition.

As Magdalena León notes, in economic terms, Buen Vivir directly challenges the logic of expanded capital accumulation and reproduction and reaffirms the logic of sustainability and expanded reproduction of life. Buen Vivir is assumed as a mode of economic and social organization and as a right of the population to a healthy and balanced life that guarantees sustainability, in an equilibrium that includes the relationship of human beings with nature. Under this perspective, the diversity of ways of organizing production, reproduction, work (or labor) and exchange are re-conceptualized.

## Food Sovereignty

The social organizations that coined the term food sovereignty are clear to state that more than a concept, food sovereignty is a principle and an ethic of life that emerges out of a collective, participating, popular, and gradual building process. This process has been enhanced by the series of political debates that have taken place as part of the process that has

brought together the peasant organizations critical of current liberal rural and food policies under the umbrella of La Via Campesina (Caro).

In different documents and declarations these organizations have defined the concept of food sovereignty as the set of rights of the peoples to define their own agricultural and food policies.

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**In Latin America new discourses, policies, and proposals for development have emerged. These new perspectives prioritize the quality of life and the enrichment of human potential.**

This includes the protection and regulation of agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development goals, to protect local markets from imports and to limit unfair pricing in

markets. The concept is materialized in the right to organize food distribution and consumption, according to the needs of communities, in sufficient quantity and quality, giving priority to local products and endogenous varieties (CLOC).

## Social Economics

The concept of social economics refers to a set of productive experiences in a given space that organize work and economic goals differently than the capitalist system. But it also refers to actors organized under economic, social, interest-representing, academic, political and other forms, whose practices are oriented to the construction of another economy, another society, more equitable and fair.

Social economics as a theory under construction, highlights values such as reciprocity and equity, and it challenges the centrality of capital profitability as the motor of economic activity typical of conventional economics.

Experiences of social economics are growing in Latin America. The new stage of globalized and concentrated capitalism, linked to the speed of technological change and the financialization: of the economy, which requires less wage labor, led to the search, outside this system, of more or less successful alternatives from the point of view of securing the enlarged reproduction of life. These initiatives are family, partnership, or community undertakings mainly linked to local markets that boost small or medium-scale territories.

Social economics comprises an institutional dimension (mutualism, cooperativism) promoted in Latin America by European

immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As well, it comprises a less institutionalized, more recent dimension linked to family and peasant agriculture and self-managed organizations (*autogestión*) that took shape under the heat of the wage labor losing crisis and that are functioning and organizing labor on the basis of a logic different than the market.

An advancement in the conceptualization of social economics integrates the solidarity dimension when the participating organizations develop new practices corresponding with a project seeking the common good, co-responsibility, justice, and social transformations towards more equitable relations, both in the family dimension (gender relations) and in the undertakings and territories where they operate.

## Inclusion and Acknowledgment

In Latin America, the various contributions to alternative thinking have helped to produce new spaces for the human rights discourse as well as to foster legislation changes in some countries, opening up spaces to respect diversity and the fulfillment of rights, as is the case of egalitarian marriage in Argentina.<sup>1</sup> In labor markets, regulations are undergoing changes with the aim to improve working conditions, guarantee the right to work and fight discrimination; for instance there have been regulation changes concerning domestic workers in private homes in Uruguay.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, care work starts to gain attention as a public policy issue,<sup>3</sup> and there is also the intention to close the gaps in access to new technologies and good quality education.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, there is a claim to face the historical debt with excluded and vulnerable groups, and an emphasis on the need to address inequalities, in particular gender inequalities. In this sense, the Bolivian Constitution includes, among the values underpinning the state, equality, inclusion, equal opportunities, and social and gender equity.

Other constitutional innovations show the acknowledgment of the economic importance of domestic work and care activities and, in general, of women's unpaid work.<sup>5</sup> In 2008, the Ecuadorian Constitution stated the need to guarantee female employment with equal rights, working conditions and social security access. Besides, the constitutional text acknowledges unpaid domestic work as productive labor and considers compensating it in special situations.

In Bolivia, the constitution acknowledges the economic value of domestic work as a source of wealth to be quantified in government finances.<sup>6</sup> In the Dominican Republic, the New Political Constitution of the State (2010) comprises the principle of equality, the right of women to live a life free of violence, and the acknowledgement of the productive value of domestic work and equal pay for equal work; moreover, it uses gender language throughout the entire constitutional text.

In Paraguay, the principle of equality upheld in the National Constitution and in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was also included in the document “Paraguay for All: A Public Policy Proposal for Social Development 2010-2012.”

These innovations show advances in institutionalizing the fight against gender inequality. As well, they are harmonious with the new

paradigms that are beginning to be formulated, restoring the concept of an economy at the service of life, as many theorists of feminist economics proclaim.

However, this body

of ideas and proposals arises in the context of unstable and weak democracies, not only from the formal point of view but also in terms of fulfillment of rights. Implementation seems to be related more to compensation or alleviating consequences of social policies than to inequalities in the distribution of resources. Some of the experiences have demonstrative power but still are at an early stage and only have a small capacity of introducing change at the macro level. Therefore, there are not yet clear and visible advances in the forms of accumulation and functioning of the economic system. It is precisely on this point that feminism, when challenging the mainstream goals of economic functioning, makes a contribution and poses questions while promoting life and life reproduction as the central objectives of the economy.

## The Contributions of Feminism

Feminist arguments have points in common with these perspectives, and their influence is at the basis of some of the above-mentioned proposals. The starting point is a critique of the functioning of the economic system and the unfair distribution of resources, work and time between women and men and among other dimensions of inequality such as class, ethnicity, and age.

Theoretical and empirical research done by feminists in previous decades has gathered growing evidence showing that gender inequalities at the micro level are related to macroeconomic results, growth, and development. There is also evidence that the promotion of gender equality is one of the components of growth as much as it is a tool for virtuous development.

The axes of the feminist debate are related to changes in macroeconomic policies and their social content, due to their crucial role in social inclusion, their relation to development dynamism, productive investment and increased productivity. In this sense, the macroeconomic environment has an impact on, and is a condition of, growth; but the traits of growth impact on equity (Espino). In this sense, policies in the region still show inertia, which has been broadly pointed out by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in a 2010 report, and discussed in regards to the influence on gender equality at the ECLAC Regional Conference on Women in Latin American and the Caribbean held in Brasilia, from July 13 to 16, 2010.<sup>7</sup>

Even though addressing gender inequalities requires specific policies, it also rests on the global macro environment. In this sense, fiscal policies and the consensus needed to adapt social spending and revenue collection to the existing needs are crucial to achieve a distribution process that has social and government responsibility for well-being as its cornerstones. An important area of feminist research of the last two decades has focused on the impact of contractionary fiscal policies and the reduced role of the state on the social organizing of care, and their negative impact on the long-term potential to improve women's quality of life. Although the policies recently undertaken in Latin America to face the impacts of the global crisis were sharply counter-cyclical, emphasizing social spending and employment objectives, they lacked a gender perspective

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**Feminist contributions include a critique of the economic system and the unequal distribution of resources, work, and time between women and men along with other dimensions of inequality such as class, ethnicity, and age.**



both in their conception and implementation (Espino 2012).

Despite progress in acknowledging the importance of domestic work and care work done by women, the situation is far from advancing care systems that adequately combine the participation of the state, the private sector, and families. Such systems, besides being very important for gender interests and diverse forms of autonomy for women, could lay the foundations for income and capacity redistribution in the long term.

## Final Reflections

The various alternative paradigms today put forward in Latin America share the proposal of undermining the centrality of the market in the economic realm, and call into question the financial sector and the hegemony of transnational corporations in the design, use, and enjoyment of profits of neoliberal globalization. These alternative paradigms place human beings, the environment, and more generally the production and reproduction of

life, at the center of the economy and development goals. The feminist approach denounces the persistence of a hierarchical gender order in many spheres and highlights the contribution of women to

social reproduction and the organization of care. But efforts to cross and integrate the alternatives with feminist approaches are at an early stage and still weak.

The consolidation and sustainability of these perspectives are not separate from the political dimension and the correlation of forces among sectors with conflicting interests. Indeed, despite the existence of more or less progressive governments in the region, there is a persistence of policies that respond to the hegemonic neoliberal model, favor concentrated economic powers, do not regulate speculative capital and have the corporative media allied to those interests. Furthermore, these policies dismiss the sphere of reproduction and care, and are gender blind.

In the majority of countries in the region (including some weak, imperfect or absent

democracies) the correlation of forces does not permit real transformation. Nevertheless, if there is a historical lesson that has left clear tracks in Latin America, it is that the paths in development are not marked by revolutionary leaps. Rather change happens by gradual paths of democratic strengthening; with sustained efforts and negotiation processes among conflicting interests; with a citizenship that integrates new actors that have previously been excluded, and who participate in those processes and control their course. Undoubtedly, the women's movement is gaining protagonism in new local and community spaces, and feminism has advanced debates and had an impact on regulations and policy design. But it has still not permeated the power structures so as to generate strong and persistent actions towards gender equity.

Despite the advances resulting from the present cycle of search for alternatives, the major challenges the region faces are still unresolved: structural measures that thoroughly impact on income redistribution, including progressive fiscal policies; strengthening of citizen participation, institutionality and transparency; deepening of regional integration. And, towards social and gender justice, there is the challenge to build a social organization of care that includes balanced contributions from the state and from men, as a way to compensate the invisible and unrecognized work women do.

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**These alternative proposals place human beings, the environment, and the production and reproduction of life at the center of economic and development goals. The feminist approach denounces the persistence of a hierarchical gender order and emphasizes the contribution of women to social reproduction and organization of care.**

## End Notes

1. In 2010 the Parliament enacted Law 22618 which stipulates that “marriage has the same requirements and effects, whether the contracting parties are of the same or opposite sexes.”
2. Law N° 18.065 on Domestic Work from 2006.
3. In the case of Costa Rica and Uruguay.
4. In Uruguay, Law N° 18.640 from 2010 created the Ceibal Support Center for Child and Youth Education with the aim to promote digital inclusion for broader and better access to education and culture and the integrated use of a netbook computer per student to sustain teaching activities in classrooms and school centers. In Argentina, Decree 416/10 created the Connecting Equality Program with the purpose of distributing 3 million netbooks in public secondary schools and teacher training centers in 2010-12 and offering capacity building for teachers with the goal to transform paradigms and learning and teaching processes. Similar proposals are stated in the Canaima Education Project of Venezuela ([www.canaimaeducativo.gob.ve](http://www.canaimaeducativo.gob.ve)).
5. The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999) acknowledges domestic work as an economic activity that produces added value, richness and social well-being. Also, it includes the right of every person –specifically including homemakers– to social security “as a public service of non-profit character to guarantee health care and secure protection in case of maternity.” Besides acknowledging the unpaid work women do, it refers to the need to take it into account in national finances.
6. Bolivian Constitution, Article 338 [www.presidencia.gob.bo/download/constitucion.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gob.bo/download/constitucion.pdf)
7. ¿Qué Estado para qué igualdad? XI Regional Conference on Women in the Americas and Caribbean, Brasilia, Brasil July 13-16, 2010.

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## Latin America

# Food Sovereignty

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# Food Sovereignty: Exploring Debates on Development Alternatives and Women's Rights

This article is a summary of a previously published article written by Chilean feminist researcher Pamela Caro. It highlights current debates about food sovereignty from a gender perspective, in which the international and Latin American peasant women movements have played a central role. It explores the challenges and promotes debate among gender equality advocates on how to connect with the peasants movement vision of food sovereignty and peasants' rights.

## What is Food Sovereignty?

The result of a collective, participatory, mass-based, and progressive process of construction, food sovereignty has been defined as the right of all peoples to define their own agricultural and food policies, giving priority to local products and indigenous varieties ("School of Women, Southern Cone" 23-25).

The concept of food sovereignty was first introduced in 1996 by La Vía Campesina, at the World Food Summit organized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome (World Food Summit, 1996). Rural women's organizations attending the forum parallel to this summit were critical of the official food security debate among government representatives because it included the concept of guaranteeing the right to food through the liberalization of the food trade.

In contrast, peasants' organizations developed the concept of food sovereignty, which establishes that "food is not a matter of the market; food is a matter of sovereignty" (Montecinos). The right to have access to food and sovereignty in the production of foods is non-negotiable.

Embracing the concept of food sovereignty implies a radical deviation from current policies; a change from export-oriented industrial production to small peasant production that is oriented to ways of life consistent with sustainability, redistribution, justice, and equity. It is an important alternative to the serious problems affecting food and agriculture globally.

## Key Components of the Food Sovereignty Model

The following components serve as an organizing model for applying a sustainable model of peasant agricultural production based on food sovereignty.

1. **The prioritization of local agricultural production** in order to feed the population (Leon & Serna 11).
2. The **revival of the Integrated Agrarian Reform** struggles.
3. The knowledge and total freedom to **exchange and improve seeds**.
4. The **struggle against genetically modified organisms** and the promotion of organic agriculture.
5. The peoples' right to base their consumption of goods on cultural, ethical, religious, aesthetic and nutritional factors. **The social function of agriculture is food production.**
6. The affirmation that food sovereignty is directly related to the ability to end global warming and cooling of the planet, **based on a sustainable mode of production.**

## The Right to Food and the Rights of Peasants

The global financial crisis and its impact on food prices has resulted in the violation of the right to food as a fundamental human right. The inability to exercise or enforce this right represents a limitation on the effective realization of other human rights.

La Vía Campesina movement speaks about the need for an international convention on the rights of peasants, as it recognizes that current international mechanisms and conventions are limited, especially when it comes to the protection of small producers from the consequences of neoliberal policies (La Vía Campesina). A study of these rights from a gender perspective confirms that they make visible the situation of peasant women, clearly establish the need to guarantee women's individual rights, and recognize the equality of peasant men and women.

## The Role of Women

Food sovereignty is a basic principle for building alternative methods of rural development and agricultural and peasant production. It includes not only rural communities but society as a whole: "it is not a peasant topic, but a topic for

society and humanity" (Rodríguez). However, which elements help to advance women's rights, and what opportunities and challenges are posed by food sovereignty for the exercise of women's rights?

Historically, no society has socially recognized or economically valued the activities necessary for human reproduction, life sustainability or maintenance, including food, although they are essential for survival. In regards to peasant women, they are the world's primary protectors of biodiversity and genetic resources, yet their contributions to the agricultural economy have been rendered invisible in official statistics (León, 2008: 8) and, from a gender perspective, have been denied social value (León and Senra 12). In short, peasant women have developed production, processing, and distribution mechanisms while unfortunately being engaged in the unequal relationship of unpaid labour.

The women's organizations that are part of the Coordination of Peasant Organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean (CLOC) have been fully involved with building a sustainable peasant production process based on the principle of food sovereignty since its inception. Food sovereignty incorporates an agenda that restores the value of the historical social function of peasant women with regards to the creative process of food production (Montecinos) under the assumption that this will contribute

to the recognition of their status as citizens and rights holders. It also includes reparations on its agenda in the sphere of gender relationships, as the value of women's contributions has been denied since the beginning of the patriarchal division of labour (León 8).

From a food sovereignty perspective, the proposals with the clearest gender content are associated with equitable access to land, credit, and training which should be oriented towards women as much as towards men. In the context of the sovereign right to produce food, the demand is that women's roles in the past and in the present, be acknowledged, prioritized, and valued.

## Opening the Debate on Gender Emancipation and Empowerment

How can we achieve this recognition and value in such a way that it can be detached from the traditional feminine stereotype in order to transform it into a vehicle of gender empowerment?

For example, the western feminist struggle has tended to question the rigid and naturalized identity between feminine and food preparation, and emancipation has frequently implied "freedom from the kitchen," as a way to aspire to shared responsibility in tasks and context. Peasant women's voices force a change in perception by understanding food conservation and preparation activities from the perspective of "other power," and prioritizing values. "At every step of our journey we have valued that role. What could be a burden for a city woman, for us is a space of power" (Rodríguez).

To face this, the economic character of reproduction needs to be accepted, and food production for self-consumption, for example, should no longer be categorized as strictly reproductive (León 205); instead it should begin to be recognized as a productive activity.

Clearly, food sovereignty has the face and hands of women. So how does it contribute to the emancipation of women? The answer is neither simple nor unidirectional.

Food sovereignty is rooted in a people's right to decide what to produce, how to produce it, and to define the distribution conditions. From a feminist perspective, it is necessary to sharpen our analysis of how power is distributed and of the decision-making process in those forums where, ideally, the right to decide should be exercised, in order to ensure internal democracy in communities and villages.

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**Food sovereignty is rooted in a people's right to decide what to produce, how to produce it and to define the distribution conditions. In this context, the demand is that women's roles in the past and in the present be acknowledged, prioritized, and valued.**



Given that food sovereignty alludes to the process of food production, preparation, and consumption - a social and historical function assigned to women in all societies - It is worth working towards a society where these activities in their reproductive and non-compensated aspects are assumed as a responsibility of society as a whole, and not the responsibility of women exclusively. In this way, these activities will gain social recognition.

All these considerations lead to the politicization of food preparation and distribution, a vital function of our economy, because “we women know how to do it, we want to be heard, we want to attain the power that will enable us to accomplish it, and we want to distribute and share the work” (Nobre).

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#### Read the complete article:

[www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)

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## Latin America

## Agroecology

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# Agroecology: Exploring Opportunities for Women's Empowerment Based on Experiences from Brazil

This article is a summary of a previously published article written by Ana Paula Lopes and Emilia Jomalinis from ActionAid Brazil. It introduces agroecology as a way of practicing agriculture or using technologies that do not harm the environment in addition to breaking with the monoculture-based rural development model. This article looks into the relationship between agroecology and feminism and proposes it as a tool that can advance empowerment processes for rural women, through ActionAid Brazil's analysis of their experiences working with rural women.

## What is Agroecology?

Agroecology accepts ecological and sociocultural biodiversity and recognizes and values diverse kinds of knowledge that differ from the dominant scientific ideology—such as the traditional knowledge and techniques of farmers. According to Norgaard and Sikor, agroecology considers alternative assumptions based upon holistic and pluralist knowledge and skills. Thus, the practical knowledge and skills of traditional cultures—such as indigenous and rural farmers—frequently equals or surpasses specialized scientific western knowledge.

Agroecology is not only a way of practicing agriculture or using technologies that do not harm the environment, it also opposes a capitalist rural development model.

In Brazil, agroecology appeared as an alternative to export-oriented monoculture where scientific-technological development increasingly drifted away from the skills and knowledge of rural workers. Traditional Brazilian agriculture has historically been perceived as antiquated and an obstacle for the country's development. Consequently, agricultural modernization has occurred without legitimate agrarian reform and land rights democratization.

This modernization process was based on intense use of improved seeds, raw industrial materials (like fertilizers and toxic agrochemicals), high mechanization and extensive use of technology in planting, irrigation and harvest. Social movements and farmers who were already struggling for land rights started fighting for another agricultural model in

opposition to the hegemonic model attempting to homogenize the rural countryside. Thus began a mobilization for alternative technologies that do not harm the environment and are based on traditional techniques. Even though in Brazil there is a long history of denial of existing traditional knowledge practices which are regarded as backwards, traditional knowledge and skills are still present in several communities and regions. It is within this context that agroecology appeared, seeking to utilize and fortify these important skills and techniques.

## Agroecology and Women's Empowerment

Agroecology can be an instrument for empowering women, as long as women's work is recognized and valued. Agroecological-oriented initiatives contribute to reducing or overcoming part of existing environmental and social problems through productive methods, techniques, and processes based on the local practices of family agriculture farmers. In family farming agriculture the woman's role is of extreme importance. However, several surveys demonstrate that although women are actively present in all productive spaces they are oppressed. The concept of women farmers' empowerment implies consideration and discussion of power relationships, as well as measures to gain control over power sources.

ActionAid Brazil started a project in 2006 entitled "Agricultural Knowledge Dissemination: Exchanging experiences and

strengthening the agroecology movement,” later called The Women and Agroecology Project. One of the main themes of the project became women and agroecology, a result of women’s recognition of their absence in important political spaces and on the invisibility of their work in agroecology development. The methodology agreed upon focused on women’s empowerment through the exchange, collection, and analysis of women-led agroecology experiences.

This process included an eight month period allocated for experience systematization, and a meeting to exchange experiences and discuss systematizations. As women’s experiences were systematized, the problems, capabilities, and results came to light, and a new perception of reality was constructed. Agroecology favors a consideration of women’s role in family farming agriculture, which is equal to, or in

many cases more important than, those of men in terms of the management of reproductive and productive work.

The exchange and systematization of experiences have been important pathways for agroecology

to progress through knowledge integration. Through the ActionAid project, women understood what they were capable of. In the experience exchanges, women challenged each other to follow new paths and break barriers. This enabled women to contemplate their possibilities, and contributed to their empowerment. The project revealed that systematizing women’s experiences is an important tool for empowerment and is a strategy for the deconstruction and denaturalization men’s dominance over women.

## Challenges for Agroecology

The Women and Agroecology Project revealed that there is a positive correlation between agroecology dynamics and women’s empowerment. However, this is not an automatic process. A consistent effort to remove women from their invisibility and open a space for them to act as subjects must be part of the agroecology

process. It is important to consider the unequal power relations within the family and to always verify how the agroecology dynamics contribute or not to women’s empowerment, as long as the women are taken into consideration during the process.

Unequal gender relations limit agroecology’s advance because they conceal the contribution of an important segment of the rural population. At the same time, male dominance commonly manifests itself as an impediment to the advancement of agroecology transition by hindering women’s free expression, their creative development and, restricting their contribution to the productive unit. When gender relations are equal, power relations within the family are equal; and the agroecology transition process advances with greater speed.

Through the project, women farmers enabled the denaturalization of the notion of male superiority by redefining in practice the notion of power by bringing to their families a scenario in which power is shared. The deconstruction of power allows change; the “power for” opens possibilities for actions without domination; it is a generating power that creates possibilities and actions. The “power with” is a shared power that manifests itself in collective solutions for a common problem.

The women participating in The Women and Agroecology Project felt the power within them. They used that power to make choices and to have opinions on what was best for their lives. They discovered that they have the potential to change their lives, yet they understood that this is a constant struggle. In this way, they became aware that they cannot stop; they will always face challenges—as women and as farmers. They continue to work to improve their living conditions and dignity, do not give up easily, and do not subject themselves to the socially subordinate role that is expected of women. They are no longer seen as helpers by their husbands, parents, and other men who now perceive these women as subjects and protagonists: in family, community, social movements and in their own lives.

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**Agroecology is a way of practicing agriculture and using technologies that do not harm the environment, it also opposes a capitalist rural development model.**

**Agroecology can be an instrument for empowering women, as long as women’s work is recognized and valued.**

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**Read the complete article:**  
[www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)

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## Latin America

# Buen Vivir as a Concept

By Martha Lanza and Raquel Romero, Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Bolivia

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## Buen Vivir: An Introduction from a Women's Rights Perspective in Bolivia

This article is a summary of a previously published article written by Martha Lanza from Fundación Colectivo Cabildeo Bolivia. It introduces Buen Vivir as a concept under construction in the Andean region that aims to shift the mindset of production and consumption against growth-based development. This article explores Buen Vivir both in its ideological construction and in its implementation in public policies in Bolivia contesting the notion of gender neutrality. In fact, one of the major challenges identified is dismantling patriarchal power structures restrict women's participation in decision making processes, and make gender inequalities invisible within indigenous communities.

Buen Vivir is closely related to the indigenous cosmovision presented by *Suma qamaña* explained by Fernando Huanacuni as "living in harmony and balance with the cycles of Mother Earth, life and history and in balance with all forms of existence." This concept comes from indigenous thinking as a proposed alternative to Western civilization.

The most salient aspect is the need to be in harmony with nature and thus establishes an uncompromising defense of all life forms. As expressed by the Bolivian Foreign Minister, Germán Choquehuanca, this model provides an alternative to capitalism that sees development as the accumulation of capital and money. The Buen Vivir model emphasizes the culture of life in the culture of complementarity with nature, leaving aside competition and production setting based in community needs without exacerbating individualism nor unfair competition.

One of the main challenges is to implement this concept in state public policies. A breakthrough for this is the definition of state included in the Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia: "a state based on respect and equality among all, with principles of sovereignty, dignity, complementarity, harmony and equity in the distribution and redistribution of social products." This constitutional principle is incorporated in the National Development Plan, which defines the country's transformation as a long-term process based on four pillars: dignity, sovereignty, democracy, and productivity.

Breaking with the extractive economic model that bleeds Mother Earth and destroys natural

resources is a key challenge. A production model that is environmentally balanced, equitable and respectful of Mother Earth needs to be established. As Raul Prada notes, for this to happen, the active participation of communities in local and national development is essential, enabling a more integrated and inclusive vision of the territory.

## Dismantling Patriarchy and Decolonization

For Aymara and Quechua indigenous women, their role in Buen Vivir is tied to the cosmological conceptions of gender that refers to the harmonious and complementary division between men and women, as explained in the mythical narratives that seek to respond to the origin of the universe and humanity, an example of which is the legend of the duo of Mama Oollo and Manco Kapac.

Although the complementarity proposed in the concept of *chachawarmi* (complementarity between men and women) is a central concept of Buen Vivir, reality shows that this premise is far from being effective given the overt inequalities between indigenous men and women in decision-making and equal distribution of resources, notably land. For indigenous thinkers, these inequalities are not yet visible or they tend to consider that this conflict is manifested by the clash of different visions and the fact that the Western political system—based on differentiation and individualization—has affected the way policies are designed and forms of community and collective representation.



Leaving aside essentialist views, it must be recognized that within indigenous communities there are contradictions and gender inequalities that cannot be denied. As indigenist researcher Maria Eugenia Choque notes, “inequalities between men and women exist in community

life, but not in all areas. For example, gender relations in agricultural production are complementary as the work and the division of labor is balanced and is part of the conception of Buen Vivir. Conflict occurs in the visible spaces of power, where women are second

fiddle even though at the time of marching and struggling for their rights, they are in the front row.”

However, *chachawarmi*, based on harmonic combination between the feminine and the masculine both in human beings and in nature, becomes a key policy instrument for indigenous women. An instrument that will allow them to rebuild the balance and harmony in gender relations—broken by the individualistic and patriarchal vision of the colonizers—drawing more on similarities than on differences, recognizing the wisdom of women in society, and community building.

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**Although the complementarity proposed in the concept of *chachawarmi* is a central concept of Buen Vivir, this premise is yet to be effective given the overt inequalities between indigenous men and women in decision-making and equal distribution of resources and land.**

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**Read the complete article:**  
[www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org)

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## Buen Vivir and Women’s Rights in Public Policies

Twenty-five articles in the Political Constitution of the State of Bolivia guarantee specific rights for women. Their adaptation in law and public policy has meant progress in the process of decolonization and dismantling of patriarchal relations in society and in the state machinery, as effective ways to deepen and implement women’s rights enshrined in the constitution.

There are a series of documents that confirm these principles:

1. **The Economic and Social Development Plan for 2010–2015** that explicitly mentions the dismantling of patriarchy within the state and society through the institutionalization of processes of transformation of the unequal system of domination, rooted in the unequal distribution of power between men and women;
2. **The National Plan for Equal Opportunities** mentions the gender equality approach aimed at dismantling patriarchy—the foundation of Western civilization—and the need to end with individualistic conceptions of gender, conceiving within the framework of Buen Vivir, free women and men, devoid of gender stigmas.

Within the structure of the state, a key step forward was the creation of a Depatriarchalization Unit that aims to make visible the patriarchal social relations and transform them to build just and harmonious societies.

These advances are the beginning of a profound transformation of the plurinational state and of unequal gender relations. The real and effective breakdown of the axis of subordination and discrimination between men and women based on: the use and abuse of women’s bodies; on the invisibility of unpaid domestic work; and in the reproduction of discriminatory cultural, political, and symbolic patterns are the major challenges that must be faced by a systemic political vision that involves both women and men.

## Latin America

# Buen Vivir in Economics

By Magdalena León,  
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## Latin America

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# Economic Redefinitions Towards Buen Vivir: A Feminist Approach

The incorporation of the concept of *Suymak Kawsay*–*Suma Qamaña* or *Buen Vivir* (Living Well) in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia takes place in the context of the crisis of neoliberalism in Latin America and, in a broader context, the global crisis of capitalism. *Buen Vivir* is rooted in the cosmovision of indigenous peoples in the Andean region and aims to give preeminence to the principles of solidarity, reciprocity, complementarity and cooperation over those of egoism and competition typical of capitalism. This article, by Ecuadorian feminist activist Magdalena León, is a summary of a larger piece available online. It outlines some aspects of the economic reformulation towards *Buen Vivir* from a feminist perspective.

## Background

The introduction of the concept of *Buen Vivir* in public policies has been a breakthrough after decades of a predominant vision of **development** that has probably been the most successful with homogenizing effects on the projects and visions of humanity as a whole, later followed, reinforced and combined with that of **globalization**. There is a sense of exhaustion with development given its inability to give an answer to problems that have to do with the continuity of life itself on the planet.

In a relatively short period, we have gone from total neoliberal hegemony to experiences that have taken on a radically different perspective, adopting *Buen Vivir* as their ordering principle. In economic terms, this implies a direct questioning of the logic of expanded capital accumulation and reproduction, as well as the reaffirmation of a logic of sustainability and expanded reproduction of life. Finding the intersections between *Buen Vivir* and feminist economics is the theoretical and political basis to define this economic alternative in the making.<sup>1</sup>

## The Immediate Economic Utility of Buen Vivir

*Buen Vivir* is described as the collective achievement of a life in fulfillment, based on harmonic and balanced relations among human beings and all living beings, in reciprocity and complementarity. It means acknowledging that human beings are a part of nature, we depend on it and that we are inter-dependent among ourselves. This signals a break with the centrality of the individual, as well as the superiority of human beings and the notions of progress, development, and well-being in the capitalist sense.

The definition of *Buen Vivir* takes into account the cosmovision of ancient peoples<sup>2</sup> and merges with advancements in feminist, ecological, and solidarity economics. All of them give life and labour (not the market) an essential role and give preference to the principles of solidarity, reciprocity, complementarity and cooperation over those of egoism and competition typical of capitalism.

Inherent in *Buen Vivir* is the feminist vision that integrates production and reproduction as inseparable processes of the economy, of wealth production and living conditions. In that sense, the broadened feminist vision values relationships and resources mobilized in production and reproduction cycles—favoring equilibrium of not just the market kind—to guarantee continuity and changes as long as they are compatible with economic justice and life sustainability.

The feminist perspective implies seeing and acting upon work relations and spaces where women and other economic agents are central actors, as well as upon patterns of economic injustices that are the foundation of this system. In addition, it implies moving from an emphasis on the deficiencies of those actors to an emphasis on the contributions they make. It is essential to reassess the value of strategic knowledge and expertise for life and the social dynamics that produce them and sustain them, in which women play a significant role.

Labor is the key aspect of economic acknowledgment, visibility, and revaluation. The Ecuadorian Constitution (2008) and subsequent public policies have included substantial redefinitions that represent a historical milestone on this matter.

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**Inherent to Buen Vivir is a feminist vision that integrates production and reproduction as inseparable processes of the economy, wealth production and living conditions.**

The very concept of work has been revised, recovering it as the axis of the economy, giving visibility to its various forms, whether in a dependency or autonomous relation, and including self-subsistence and human care activities. This is essential in Ecuador, a country whose employment and labor structure is very diverse and requires new mechanisms to strengthen the sectors and initiatives that have been overlooked or even stigmatized, such as peasant work and independent work in general (formerly considered informal), unpaid family work, among others.

tence and human care activities. This is essential in Ecuador, a country whose employment and labor structure is very diverse and requires new mechanisms to strengthen the sectors and initiatives that have been overlooked or even stigmatized, such as peasant work and independent work in general (formerly considered informal), unpaid family work, among others.

### Care as an Economic Category of New Outcomes

Care economics has been built within feminist economics as a broad field, related to the indispensable conditions for life-cycle reproduction of all human beings, given that in various degrees along our life cycle we need care, including access to goods, services and attention, all inseparable from material flows.

This is the economic field whose functioning principle par excellence is **solidarity**, within situations of injustice and inequality that demand the exercise of **reciprocity**. It is also a reality that brings to light the **principle of interdependence** of human beings, as opposed to the neoclassical economic approach that proclaims free competition in a labor market of totally independent and autonomous individuals.

But the Buen Vivir approach opens new pathways for the economic dimension of care. A harmonious and balanced relationship with nature is a condition for life, since human life depends on other forms of life. These are life forms and systems that not only must stop being preyed upon, but need restoration, protection and sustainable management—all requiring work and resource mobilization.

### Rethinking Productivity

In a mid-term perspective, transition towards Buen Vivir requires the redefinition of key concepts such as productivity. Conventional ideas of productivity, centered on the goal of maximizing efficiency to maximize profits (systemic productivity), are to be redefined in terms of maximizing economic sustainability and diversity with a human and environmental balance.

This means acknowledging the interrelation between the productive and the reproductive; going beyond efficiency as the achievement of “more with less always” referring to the optimal use of resources in given circumstances and tying this optimum to protection and justice. It implies overcoming the ideals of expansion and growth to nuance them taking into account the achievement of life equilibriums—which in concrete situations and contexts may mean contraction and de-growth.

### Final Notes

The feminist agenda of economic redefinitions towards the construction of Buen Vivir is outlined on the basis of the cumulative theoretical and practical knowledge advanced by women for centuries. Yet, at the same time, it requires taking a certain distance from biases installed in neoliberal times, in some cases considered a natural part of the economic agenda for women. **We need to stand back from:**

- The sectorial perspective of gender and economics, that establishes limited or restricted visions regarding certain issues like income, assets, etc., without questioning the system they belong to.
- The cosmetic vision of gender that uncritically attaches gender to issues, without taking into account compatibilities or coherences. Neoliberalism did not neglect women, but it developed a vision and practices assigning women to poverty and

microcredit, with discourses attempt to make women promoters of entrepreneurial visions to have women pave the way to building the market society inherent to capitalism.

- A vision limited to the economic rights of women without relevant connections to a critical redefinition of the model or a re-reading of the economy “as it is”; all tasks to be part of the changes to come.
- A notion of inertial incidence that places women outside processes for change, considering them external. It is necessary to act in co-participation, finding the differences with those opposing or not taking part in the construction of change, as well as finding the coincidences and unprecedented alliances that today represent an opportunity to share transforming activities.

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Magdalena Leon is the coordinator and national link of the Latin American Network Women Transforming the Economy, in Quito, Ecuador. This article is a summary of a larger article available at [www.awid.org/Library/The-Feminist-Perspectives-Towards-Transforming-Economic-Power-Topic-3-Buen-Vivir](http://www.awid.org/Library/The-Feminist-Perspectives-Towards-Transforming-Economic-Power-Topic-3-Buen-Vivir)

## End Notes

1. There is an unprecedented revaluation of feminism, in some cases being called feminist socialism.

2. Almost all native peoples of the American continent have concepts similar to Buen Vivir, and these concepts are part of the heritage and the practices of peoples all over the world.



## South Asia

### An Overview

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## South Asia An Overview



# Alternative Strategies for Development: A South Asian Feminist Perspective

Women's movements in South Asia and other parts of Asia, through their own struggles as well as in ways articulated by some influential leaders, have already specified many of the important elements of an alternative development that provides social and economic justice to both women and men. This article, by Indian researcher Jayati Ghosh, explores the implications of different demands of the women's movement in India, to generate a broader conceptual framework for development and policies related to it, that applies to South Asia as well as other regions.

## The Development Debate in Asia

Asia is extremely diverse and also home to around 60% of the world's population. As such, this paper makes no claims to provide a comprehensive perspective on alternative development strategies for all of Asia. Instead, it provides ideas relevant for South Asia, and within that, India (itself a very diverse country, as well as one that encapsulates many contemporary development dilemmas).

For much of the past two decades, rapid growth in GDP in the region has precluded substantial public discussion on its pattern of distribution. That said, some perceptive analysts underscored the deeply problematic features of the previous boom, including the inequality in and lack of sustainability of the growth pattern. The recent global crisis also brought more attention to the sustainability (or lack thereof) of the process of growth.

In several countries of the region, the women's movement has emerged as a strong voice within the development debates and, in many cases, has gone beyond what are generally seen as women-specific issues (such as violence against women, and discrimination) to basic issues that affect the condition of people (albeit in a gendered way) in general, such as access to food, shelter, sanitation, work, and working conditions in general. In doing so, demands raised by women's organizations are at the forefront of broader societal demands, particularly through the use of a human rights based approach to legislation and government policy. Discussions on development are increasingly

driven by agendas that have historically been part of the women's movements' demands, and there are an increasing number of strong and articulate young women who are challenging the status quo and seeking their own empowerment. All these are positive signs for the future, despite the contemporary context, which is quite worrying in many ways.

## What are the Main Issues and Challenges to Sustainability in Asia?

Sustainable development can be most simply defined as development that meets the needs of people in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The strategy of rapid, corporate, profit-led growth in the region has generated a period of economic buoyancy, but has also involved significant increases in inequality and raised serious questions about sustainability.

Some of the problems that are evident include:

- the growing inequalities that have emerged as part of the accumulation process;
- the increased fragility of agricultural cultivation, which continues to be the dominant source of livelihood in the region;
- rising prices of food and other essential goods in a context in which South Asia accounts for the largest number of hungry and malnourished people in the world, especially among women and girls;
- displacement and dislocation of people from their homes and livelihoods related to urban and industrial development;

**Rapid corporate, profit-led growth in the region has generated economic buoyancy, but has also involved significant increases in inequality and raised serious questions about sustainability.**

- the extraction of natural resources and the concentration of land holdings, resulting in greater tension and conflicts over access to and control over land, water, forests and certain mineral resources;
- ecological damage that has already created limits to production in certain cases and has, without a doubt, adversely affected quality of life levels and sustainability;
- low remuneration and highly vulnerable nature of small-scale non-agricultural production, which accounts for a greater and growing part of total employment, as, it should be noted, the growth process has not resulted in much increase in formal (protected) employment;
  - growing wage inequality, including gender wage gaps which are among the highest in the world and have increased in recent times;
- increasing time poverty, especially among women, as public provision of essential goods and services (especially care and health) becomes more scarce, expensive or hard to access and environmental policies affect access to common property resources;
- very poor indicators of human development that have barely improved despite more than two decades of rapid growth, and increasing evidence of new problems affecting conditions of life because of rapid and unplanned urbanisation.

In much of this region, despite rapid growth, the development project is far from complete. The minimum conditions for a decent and secure life with dignity have yet to be met for a large amount of the population, including particularly women. Indeed, in some ways, there has actually been regression in living standards and enjoyment of human rights for a significant number of people. Large numbers of people face greater material insecurity because of the combined onslaught of multiple crises (food, livelihood, climate, environment, human security). There is a widespread food crisis, while farmers' incomes continue to stagnate and cultivation is barely viable in large parts of the region. Despite the global perception of a shift in manufacturing jobs from Northern countries to Southern countries, manufacturing employment has either slightly increased or, in fact, declined even in the most dynamic Asian countries.

Inequality is breeding not just social tensions but unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. The demographic bulge of young people is occurring at a time when productive employment generation is weak and deteriorating. This is a particular problem for young women and men who have been through expensive tertiary education in the hope of improving their lives. Meanwhile, the spread of communications technology has widened the extent of knowledge about new forms of consumption and shifted aspirations among people, even among the very poor. So not only are the essential conditions for decent existence still lacking for a substantial proportion of the region's inhabitants, but struggles and conflicts over such gaps are likely to increase.

Increasing inequality is due largely to the fact that the previous global boom was associated with a pattern of growth in which the poor subsidized the rich globally and within countries, based on flows of goods, labour and capital from South to North. This is proving to be unsustainable—it cannot continue for many reasons, both internal and external. The export-driven macroeconomic model is facing new constraints in the face of global economic uncertainty. The possibility of using finance to deliver credit-led booms is also lower given that several such bubbles have already burst. Within countries, social and political tensions—generated by inequality and uncertainty—are also on the rise. So, there is really no option but to consider alternative trajectories of development that are more inclusive, just and democratic.

## Voices from the Women's Movement on Development Alternatives

It is within this context in which the search for feasible and sustainable trajectories for development have become not just more important but also essential in the region. Women's movements that have been articulating such demands for some time now are well placed to provide such alternative strategies, for the region and globally. Different women's voices have already made critical interventions highlighting important points: the need to be more respectful of nature, including the evolution of patterns of consumption and production toward an alternative that is neither predatory nor destructive of nature; the importance of recognising and reducing the burden of unpaid

work; the need to ensure access to paid work with dignity and decent working conditions; and the critical importance of affordable food and nutrition, among others.

To seriously consider an alternative development trajectory, it is necessary to define what type of development is considered to be desirable, including reflecting upon the minimum requirements that must be achieved for all the citizens of the developing world. Clearly, these basic needs (often described as economic and social rights) include the following for every human being:

- Material needs: food, clean water, housing, electricity, sanitation, transport, education and health services.
- Livelihood: viable cultivation, opportunities to work in productive non-agricultural activities and to move on to higher productivity and higher value—added activities with good working conditions.
- Human security and freedom: the ability to live with dignity and without fear of violence or discrimination, to develop full capabilities and to have social and political voice.

It is important to note that achieving this necessarily requires a significant increase in production and imports to ensure the availability of goods and services that will ensure these basic needs for the citizens of the developing world. This has an important implication—that the requirement for global resources will not simply be reduced by cutting down on luxury consumption in the North and South. In other words, even if the elites and middle classes of developing Asia (and particularly China and India) and the rest of the world stopped increasing their consumption, bringing the vast majority of the developing world's population to anything resembling a minimally acceptable standard of living will involve extensive use of global resources. It will necessarily imply more natural resource use and more carbon emissions, although surely this can be achieved in future in a significantly less wasteful way.

However, it is also equally clear that this strategy of ensuring basic needs for all in a sustainable way cannot and will not be achieved on the basis of the existing model of growth. Therefore, a new and different development model is required in the South, and particularly in developing Asia. Such a model must move away from a single-minded focus on GDP to be generated by export-led strategies towards a focus on improving living conditions for all,

based on domestic wage and employment-led growth and productive employment with good conditions. A very different attitude toward nature will also be necessary.

Some elements of an overall strategy, which are directly relevant for South Asia but clearly have wider applicability, include the following:

1. Make the economic growth process more inclusive and employment intensive: direct resources and investment to the sectors in which the poor work (such as agriculture and informal activities), areas in which they live (regions with poor or inadequate infrastructure), elements of production that they possess and outputs that they consume (such as food).
2. Re-orient growth in a sustainable direction: shift from carbon-based (coal and oil) growth to solar, nuclear and renewable energy; emphasise cleaner transport systems and better urban planning and management, protecting and nurturing dwindling water and other natural resources, and mitigating the effects and adapting to the possibilities of climate change-induced natural disasters.
3. A greater role of the state in directing investment and production to socially desirable and sustainable channels and reorienting consumption through direct redistributive strategies as well as through increased public expenditure on basic goods and services. Fiscal policies should be fashioned in order to encourage such activity, for example by prioritising safe, clean, green, and efficient public transport over chaotic, polluting, and congesting private transport.
4. Provide significantly better social protection, with increased funding, wider coverage and consolidation, and more health spending, more robust and extensive social insurance programmes, including pensions and unemployment insurance. Such social protection cannot be based on the male breadwinner model, nor should it be tied to paid formal employment. Rather, it must be oriented to individuals, and recognise their varied social roles, including the different requirements of women and girls in specific contexts.
5. Improve financial sector performance while ensuring financial stability, by emphasising financial inclusion, systematic state regulation and control of finance. Since private players will inevitably attempt to circumvent regulation, the core of the financial system

—banking—must be protected, which is only possible through social ownership. In developing countries this is also important because it enables public control over the direction of credit, without which no country has industrialised.

6. In line with the above point, financial inclusion of women must go beyond the crumbs of microcredit to genuine inclusion in institutional finance through directed credit. Microcredit (and microfinance, more broadly) has often been touted as a means (within a market mechanism) to reduce poverty and empower women. In fact, though, microcredit as it is typically understood and delivered, does not challenge the systemic/structural underpinnings of poverty and patriarchy—and, as such, more often than not fails to advance the human rights of poor people, including particularly women.<sup>1</sup>
7. Shift the focus of policy from GDP growth to quality of life indicators, which themselves must be monitored. For example, a chaotic, polluting and unpleasant system of privatised urban transport involving many private vehicles and over-congested roads actually generates more GDP than a safe, efficient and affordable system of public transport that reduces vehicular congestion and provides a pleasant living and working environment. Therefore the ultimate focus should be on living conditions and human rights (not GDP). This means in turn developing quantifiable measures that can be regularly estimated and monitored to hold governments and other agents accountable.
8. Reduce the burden of unpaid work that falls primarily upon women. This does not necessarily mean trying to price all human activity, but rather socially investing in infrastructure and activities (such as care work in all its forms) that shift some of the burden of these tasks off women to governments.
9. Since governments will have to be more proactive and interventionist, develop ways to ensure greater democratization and accountability of government at different levels, through decentralization and greater participation, as well as other methods to ensure more voice not just to the average citizen but to marginalised groups and particularly to women.

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Jayati Ghosh is one of the world's leading women economists. She is professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru university, New Delhi, and is closely involved with a range of progressive organisations and social movements.

## End Note

1. See the paper by Soma K. Parthasarathy on a critique of microcredit in the context of India from a feminist perspective, where the shortcomings of microcredit are discussed more in depth. Parthasarathy, Soma K. *Fact and Fiction: Examining Microcredit/Microfinance from a Feminist Perspective*. Ed. Natalie Raaber. AWID, 2012. Web. Feb. 2012.



Asia  
Pacific

## Diverse Economies

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Asia Pacific  
Diverse Economies



## Diverse Economies: Gifting, Caring, Exchanging, Exploiting, and Empowering

In the Pacific and around the world, women are involved in diverse economies: the formal, informal, care, and gift economies. All may at some point be economically marginalized. In this brief article - part of a book soon to be released by ZED books—feminist geographer Yvonne Underhill-Sem discusses diversity in relation to the embodiment of economic practices and alerts against homogenizing approaches that conceal the existence of alternative economies preventing them from flourishing.

Capitalism is not the only flourishing system of economic exchange. Feminist economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996) draw attention to the diverse way by which exchanges occur, values are attributed and systems emerge. Moreover, they argue that women in particular often move in and out of these systems with ease. This helps us understand the many contradictions in the ways women are engaged in the economy: on one hand lacking full access to land, capital, training, technology, and employment and yet on the other hand making significant contributions to national economic security as, for example, small holders, subsistence producers, domestic informal sector workers, and household workers.

Consider the process by which cut flowers are cultivated mostly by women in the Global South and mostly consumed by women in the Global North. Consider the cultural and social meanings that are associated with giving and accepting of flowers. Consider the diverse ways that women are empowered and disempowered within this political ecology<sup>1</sup> of flowers. The complications, contradictions, and challenges are not easily understood within mainstream economic discourse. Yes, there is the exploitative and dangerous work of cut flower production. Yes, regular wages are welcomed. Yes, there are escalating and devastating embodied and environmental impacts. Yes, there is solidarity in sweat. Yes, related chains of care are compromised. Yes, the list could go on. More useful than mainstream economic analysis to understand this, is a diverse economies

perspective which enlarges our understanding of the many and varied economies that many women move between.

Within feminist analysis, diversity is well understood as a key concept to appreciate the multiplicity of embodied subject positions that women occupy. This has been especially important in relation to sexual and political practices. Feminist economic geographer Sarah Wright notes, “conceptualizations of the economy as diverse and multiple has garnered increasing attention [because]... against the debilitating mantra of TINA (there is no alternative) ... many viable and vital alternatives to capitalism do, in fact, exist” (Wright, 297). Following the seminal work of Gibson-Graham, the notion of diverse economies provides critical means by which economic activities can be better understood in all their complexity.

These contradictions arise because women operate in diverse economies. From formal paid employment, to micro, small and medium sized businesses, to regular informal fresh produce, fish and food marketing, and the periodic production of handicrafts. Even economies that did not in the past count the daily care of home, family, and community can no longer be overlooked because increasing numbers of women employ other women to undertake their care work. In addition to the care economy, the gift economy<sup>2</sup> continues to sustain ever-present cultural obligations. In the Pacific, this includes: collecting, preparing, and weaving terrestrial and marine resources for mats, fans, garlands, and ceremonial items; and raising livestock and storing seasonal harvests.

Clearly the incentives for women to be involved in economic activities are also diverse. Some of these incentives include the fulfillment of career aspirations, making money for a long term comfortable life, making money to make ends meet, paying off debt, escaping from the drudgery of routine life, desire for independent income, desire for a relaxed life, and desire for community and social enjoyment. Improving women's economic empowerment therefore, requires a good understanding of the kinds of incentives that will leverage increasing and diverse economic activity.

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**Improving women's economic empowerment requires an understanding of the incentives that leverage an increase and diversity in economic activity.**

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## End Notes

1 Political ecology is a way of understanding the politicized ways that humans engage with nature at various geographical scales.

2 The gift economy is an economic system in which goods and services flow between people without explicit agreement of their value or future reciprocity.

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In the Pacific, women are involved in the formal economy, the informal economy, the care economy, and the gift economy. All may at some point be economically marginalized. Even some women in the formal economy are

marginalized and starved of material enrichment if they are not paid or if they have no control of their income. This points to particular systems that discriminate against women: socio-cultural systems that allow men to control women's assets; political systems that silence or deny women's voice; and economic systems that prohibit women's fair returns to her labor.

Marketplaces are particular places where a wide range of economic exchanges occur—they could be a daily fresh produce and food market, a local fair, a series of road-side stalls, a farmers market or a large market in a city. In the Pacific, they are the sites where many of these diverse economies can be found—often intersecting in complicated ways with one another. Marketplaces, however, differ in many significant ways across the Pacific depending on the mix of diverse economies and the nature of marginalizing processes. In the Eastern Pacific, where per capita incomes are on average higher than the Western Pacific, marketplaces are more likely to be well managed, vibrant, safe, and sociable places for women and families. Marketplaces however can also be neglected, poorly designed, unsafe, and unpleasant places to linger in. Yet they persist because they are a site of exchange, especially for the poorest and most marginalized women.

The problem with any kind of hegemonic economic analysis is that imaginations and hence practice remains the same. This contributes to the unquestioned continuation of capitalist systems that systematically conceal

other economies. Moreover, they destroy the possibilities for them to flourish. This happens gradually and often with misplaced fanfare. For example, microfinancing for women effectively, and often inadvertently, draws women into economic relationships that offer them little negotiating power and contributes to perverse forms of debt. This is not new. There are still many inequitable and exploitative economic systems such as feudalism and slavery, which destroy the human fabric of all social relations. These processes are not, however, just sequels to historical mistakes but they have systematic properties of exploitation. So, coming back to our initial example of exchanges in cut flower markets, to ensure we can enjoy the diverse pleasures of flowers, we need to be vigilant. Specifically, we need to ensure women's equality is a central principle in the diverse economies in which women choose to be involved, and that these effectively contribute to their economic empowerment.

# Africa

## An Overview

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### Africa

#### An Overview

#### Challenging Land Grabbing



# Development Alternatives for a Post-Crisis World: An African Perspective

The struggle to secure land rights, decent work and sustainable livelihoods for all has been a longstanding issue for most parts of Africa since the colonial period. This article by feminist activist researcher Dzodzi Tsikata explains how women's groups and civil society movements have been historically pushing for change and how economic liberalization is losing its legitimacy as the most commonsensical approach to drive development.

### Understanding the History: Development Debates about Africa

There have been debates about Africa's development since the attainment of independence from colonial rule of many African countries in the 1960s. The modernization approach, which stressed technological development, the building of solid infrastructure, and the diffusion of formal education, was the dominant development discourse of the 1960s in the newly independent African countries and was accompanied by hope and excitement. It resulted in the expansion of basic education and large scale infrastructure projects. However, very soon, the search for alternatives to modernization was on. Problems of economic stagnation, rural underdevelopment, and poverty pointed to the failure of the modernization project.

The provision of basic needs, rooted in rural development and supported by appropriate technologies became the dominant development approach in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Just before the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) from the early 1980s, Africans were once more engaged in a development debate within the context of a global economic and social development crisis triggered by a commodity prices collapse and a sharp rise in oil prices. Many Africans saw this as a crisis of both the capitalist and socialist development models manifested by growing inequalities between North and South, the rising power

of transnational corporations, unequal terms of international trade, falling living standards and health conditions, rising food prices, and growing social and political tensions as well as an arms race.

For the first time, African women entered this debate as experts, through the Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD), a continental research and advocacy organization composed of academics, development practitioners, and activists. Working with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, AAWORD organized a seminar in June 1982 in Dakar, under the theme "Another Development with Women." The seminar issued a Dakar Declaration on Another Development with Women. The vision of another development posited in this declaration is a far cry from the SAPs imposed on African governments soon after that. While this declaration was largely forgotten in the insistence that there were no alternatives to SAPs, its recommendations are as relevant as if they were written today (Dakar Seminar on Another Development with Women).

After the introduction of SAPs in the 1980s, using debt relief and IMF and World Bank financing as leverage, backed by a large and sophisticated intellectual enterprise of justification, the contestations about the most correct approach to Africa's development continued. After a few years of adjustment, the goal of development was jettisoned in favour of economic growth, which was expected to trickle down to the household level and improve the lives of all Africans.

In debating the rights and wrongs of SAPs, the development agenda of African countries was relegated to background noise. This was in spite of proposals of an African alternative to SAPs (AAF-SAP). While it received no traction from the donors, and was not adopted by adjusting countries, it marked an early effort by Africans to establish their own priorities and developmental agenda.

Two decades later in 2003, African heads of state met and adopted The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as the new development agenda. NEPAD has been heavily critiqued for retaining a neo-liberal approach

to Africa's development agenda, failing to involve academia and civil society groups in its deliberations and plans and neglecting to address the growing inequalities in various

countries. In the critique of NEPAD, development alternatives were once again put forward by a broad range of actors including feminist scholars.

The struggle for secure land rights, decent work, and sustainable livelihoods for all, irrespective of gender, has been a long-standing issue since the colonial period. Women, together with men, were active in the anti-colonial struggle and also in the politics of the post-colonial struggles at different periods, particularly since SAPs were instituted in Africa. What has been gained in this struggle is significant, in the sense that economic liberalization has lost its legitimacy as the most commonsensical approach to the serious economic challenges of developing economies (Tsikata).

### Where We Stand: Africa's Development Crisis

The main problems with Africa's development are well known, and often discussed in debates about alternatives. They are the failure of agrarian transformation and industrialization in Africa resulting in its positioning in the global order as the supplier of agricultural raw materials, unskilled labor, and a market for a range of consumer items which it does not produce. Elements of the failed agrarian transformation include the poor linkages among the various sectors of the economy and a weak food crop sector with serious challenges to food sovereignty and security.

After over two decades of SAPs, problems such as high rates of unemployment, labor market inequalities, widespread informalisation of work, and social reproduction deficits have become endemic. Linked to this is the growth in social inequalities, poverty, and poor social indicators. Class, gender, regional, and rural-urban inequalities are on the rise.

The lack of a robust social policy regime has been exacerbated by the limitations of gender and development policies and practices. In spite of the shifts from women in development (WID), women and development (WAD), gender and development (GAD) to gender mainstreaming, gender equity programmes continue to be dominated by income generation projects, training and skills building, credit and group formation. Gender equality provisions in land and labor legislation remain quite limited and only partially implemented.

The current global financial, energy, and food crises have deepened Africa's developmental challenges. Africa has been particularly vulnerable because of the particularities of its insertion into the global economy and its pre-existing economic and social development deficits. As predicted, the crises are affecting African countries, albeit to different degrees, in terms of six pathways of impact or channels of transmission: the slowing of export growth as a result of lower export volumes and falling commodity prices; the reduction of portfolio and foreign direct investments and more expensive foreign capital; exchange rate losses, rising interest rates, a decline in remittances and foreign aid; and a down-turn in tourism.

There are particular social groups in Africa most affected by the crisis. These include: households living in poverty in rural and urban areas and in inhospitable agro-climatic zones; food crop farmers particularly those operating on a small scale or assisting with family farm enterprises; workers in informal economies, particular those operating in its survivalist segments; and unemployed people, particularly young school drop-outs. These people constitute the majority of the African population.

For many women in Africa it is gender inequalities in the division of productive and reproductive labour; the gender segmentation of the labor markets; and inequalities in access to and control of productive resources, particularly land, capital and labor, that have made them particularly vulnerable. Women farmers and urban women in the small-scale trading and service sectors of the informal economy

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**After a few years of adjustment, the goal of development was jettisoned in favour of economic growth, which was expected to trickle down to the household level and improve the lives of all Africans.**



constitute a large segment of the poor, and they are not likely to have financial reserves and other resources to survive the global downturn. They and their households, particularly in situations where they are the sole breadwinners, are vulnerable to deeper impoverishment. Past experience has shown that while women often experience impacts more deeply, but also in very particular ways, their situation is worsened by unfavorable policy choices to mitigate the impacts of crises.

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Never have the livelihoods of so many been so precarious. The scale of the problem of livelihood insecurities is a threat to democracy and development. The lack of employment statistics in most countries, with the exception of South Africa, and the proliferation of precarious

informal work has protected governments from having to answer for the employment policy failures under SAPs. However, the impact of the situation can be seen in election and other forms of political violence, agitations for economic and political reform, and regular strikes in Kenya, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Swaziland, Malawi, South Africa, and Ghana, to name a few.

### Women's Rights Activism for Alternative Development

As we have indicated, women's rights activists and intellectuals have been calling for alternative development that is gender equitable for decades. African perspectives have influenced thinking on a gender equitable alternative development agenda. At the level of the World Conferences on Women, African women's perspectives influenced the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action, whether it was in insisting on attention to poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation or championing the cause of rural women and girls. African feminist perspectives have also been influential in the global women's movement's positions on a wide range of issues.

However, the fragmentation of development issues as a result of their ordering by United

Nations processes has hampered the design of holistic agendas for alternative development. For example, women's rights activists, researchers, and policy makers often specialize in two or three of the twelve critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action or one of the eight millennium development goals. This situation has been worsened by the limitations of organizational forms and demands of some of the gender equality activism. In the case of land for example, the demands have been largely about registration of land titles in the names of both spouses, participation in land adjudication bodies and the reform or circumscription of customary law. In the case of work and employment, the demands remain credit and improved technologies for self-employed workers. Not much attention is being paid to the wider neo-liberal paradigm and its deficit. In terms of organizational form, most organizations are NGOs and lack the membership and mobilization strength, while devoting much of their attention to policy advocacy.

In spite of these limitations, various statements of African women's organizations since the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies are an implied or explicit critique of the dominant development paradigm. African feminists, in collaboration with the regional and global women's movements, ensured that both the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action took seriously the questions of poverty, livelihood insecurities, and gender-biased economic policies.

Women in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Sierra Leone, to name a few, have been at the forefront of advocacy to promote gender equity in the land tenure reforms of their countries. Most importantly, African women have been at the forefront of recent food riots and community actions over land deals in several African countries. In their day to day lives, women have been on the frontline of the struggle for survival at the level of their households and communities.

What has been gained in these struggles is significant, in the sense that economic liberalization has lost its legitimacy as the most commonsensical approach to the serious economic challenges of African economies. As well, popular struggles have put poverty, poor development indicators, the lack of participation in policy making, and undemocratic gender discriminatory decision-making at the centre of a critique of economic policies. In spite of this, and even in the face of the global financial crisis,

economic policy remains steeped in economic liberalization and the belief in the markets to regulate economic transactions in the most efficient and optimal manner. Economic policies remain gender blind, continue to privilege the private sector as the engine of growth, and neglect the conditions of labor.

## Towards the Establishment and Implementation of Development Alternatives

The magnitude of the current global crisis has provided the opportunity to move the search for alternative development approaches from statements to sustained practice, particularly as the broad outlines of various alternatives have been in place in Africa for decades. In the Dakar Declaration on Alternative Development, for example, an agenda for gender equitable sustainable development was laid out. Its main elements are agrarian transformation and economic diversification with a clear industrialization strategy. This includes agricultural intensification and commercialization involving high value production with linkages to industry, but also giving equal attention to food production and distribution for own consumption and to increase household incomes. This strategy has a place for trade, but trade not to open up economies but to support the development aspirations of African countries and to promote regional integration.

A key aspect of this strategy is the creation of decent employment as well as support for social reproduction. Social development, poverty reduction, the realization of the demographic dividend and the reduction of social inequalities of gender, class, and location are key goals of the strategy. The return of a reformed developmental state that drives development is an important underpinning of the strategy. Such a state is not only pro-active in the promotion of developmental goals, but also promotes democracy, popular participation, social development, and equity. To fulfill these objectives, the post-colonial patriarchal African state needs fundamental reforms.

## Challenges Ahead

Beyond the detailing of these broad outlines into a programmatic strategy, alternative development approaches need traction. They were prevented from flourishing, not because they are unworkable, impractical, or not detailed enough, but because of the weak position of African countries in relation to other powers in the global order, and the inability of African civil society mobilization to force a fundamental change in direction. Increasingly, popular struggles are being led by NGOs, and mass mobilization has been replaced by policy advocacy fragmented in single issues. The changing and complicated terrain of struggle demands organizational forms that can both mobilize and are effective policy advocates. It also demands the recognition that the struggle for alternative development strategies and their implementation requires broad interconnected agendas for change. Without these fundamental shifts, there can be no alternative development.

The importance of certain kinds of mass mobilization, the reform of NGO activism and the need for greater room for gender perspectives are key. Feminists need to be more pro-active in linking their concerns with those of other popular forces in ways that strengthen popular struggles.

Above all, Africa needs to reclaim its policy sovereignty. The efforts by European powers and the United States to address their respective debt crises and the turmoil on the streets, represented by the occupation movements, contain lessons about the role of states in driving solutions, the need for governments to work together in the supreme interest of Africa and the importance of paying attention to the conditions of the most adversely affected constituencies in this crisis.

Feminist leadership is more necessary than ever before. This is because in spite of its limitations and the difficulties of the terrain, feminist analyses of the global economic and social crisis and its solutions remain the most encompassing and forward looking. The feminist vision of development remains the most inclusive and most humane. Feminists must claim space at the centre of the struggle for alternative development and work with mainstream actors in academia, policy and civil society to ensure that alternative development, which becomes dominant, will be gender equitable and sustainable.

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## Africa

# Challenging Land Grabbing

Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)  
Our Land, Our Life:  
Grassroots Women's  
Resolve to Fight for their  
Rights to Resources in  
Tanzania. Reflections  
from 10th Gender Festival,  
September 2011,  
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

## Africa

### An Overview

### Challenging Land Grabbing



# Voices from South-East Africa: Challenging Land Grabbing

*"We are not leaving this land, we were born here, we grew up here, this is where we get our livelihoods from, this is where we bear and raise our children. Where do you want us to do this? We are not going anywhere, we are here to stay."*

—Women from Loliondo District, Tanzania, at the 10th Gender Festival, 2010.

## The Multiple Faces of Land Grabbing

The story of land grabbing from local people by investors (local and foreign) who are protected by the government through existing land laws or their weak enforcement is taking place all over Tanzania and Africa. Problems of land grabbing or manipulative land sales have been reported to give way to investors who are planting forests for carbon trade (OECD 2008) to produce genetically modified seeds. There are many cases across the country where farmers and pastoralists have been forced to move out of land they have lived on and used for production and cultural purposes for many years, often sparking many conflicts between investors and local people. Large tracks of land have been grabbed from unsuspecting rural people to give way to investors. Moreover, customary land tenure, which accounts for more than 70% of the land owned, is practically inferior to statutory tenure since it can easily be overridden such as by presidential order to change land use. Although women within marriage have been given land ownership rights under the 1999 Land Acts, such a right is subject to prevailing customary law governing land tenure. However, these invariably favor men since land is inherited through patriarchal rules. Even in matrilineal ethnic groups, it is the uncle who has the final say. Empowering women to stand up for their land rights offers hope and becomes critical when talking about alternatives.

## Challenging Patriarchal Norms, Practices, and Other Forms of Marginalisation

At the household level, the problem of access and control of resources—food sovereignty—reflects the patriarchal system where women are often denied their right to use, inherit, and control land, thereby undermining their livelihoods and food sovereignty.

Martha Laurent from Hanang district, Manyara region, Tanzania, presented an angle of women's plight that undermines food sovereignty within the family because they lack control of household resources. They are also excluded from decision-making. According to Laurent, many men in her area sell family food (maize, beans) and in some cases family land, without consulting their wives. Unfortunately, the money is used to buy liquor or for other personal use. In most cases women cannot challenge this behavior due to patriarchal cultural limitations. When women take matters to the village government, the leaders, who are mostly men, sometimes favor their male colleagues by simply doing nothing about the reported problem.

Finally, there are problems that relate to agricultural inputs prices, quality, and timely availability. The distribution of subsidized fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides through the voucher system has become a national fiasco. Farmers are tricked into selling their vouchers to traders who in turn sell the inputs at a higher price, making inputs too expensive, hence inaccessible, especially for women and other

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marginalized groups. The slow growth rates of food production in Tanzania, and recurrent localized food deficits have been attributed to

low technology (fertilizer or manure, use of unimproved seed, low level or irrigated agriculture, post harvest loss), and persistent drought. Conventional solutions such as using heavy dosage of industrial

fertilizer are now being challenged by the food sovereignty movement in order to ensure food safety and sustainable production systems. In Tanzania, alternative technologies such as organic farming, zero tillage, integrated pest management have been promoted, but they are spreading slowly.

## Collective Demands

Forums such as the Annual Tanzania Gender Festival (TGF) provide a good framework for such guidance through collective reflection, and strategic planning. From this year's TGF, participants made a number of resolutions that are relevant for containing land grabbing while protecting food sovereignty:

- recommending that land ownership becomes a constitutional issue;
- demanding 50/50 representation of women and men in all decision-making organs, including parliament;
- requiring that the rights of all citizens' categories should be clearly stipulated in the constitutions to avoid marginalization.

As recommended by Tsikata, making these changes requires redefining the terrain of the struggle from focusing on specialized issues to addressing a broad range of issues, and rededicating to the transformation of social relations and policy agendas (Tsikata, 2011).

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## Europe

### Reflections on De-Growth

By Christa Wichterich

## Europe

### Reflections on De-growth



## The Future We Want: Occupy Development

In the whole of Europe at the grassroots level, alternative projects and practices are revitalized or reinvented. Feminist sociologist and activist Christa Wichterich argues the growth/de-growth debate—that questions quantitative growth as the sole lever for development—is an opportunity for feminists to connect debates on which they focused in the recent past. This includes the care economy, commons and commoning, and a critique of neoliberal globalization and its production and consumption patterns.

The analysis of the multidimensional and interlocking crises as a systemic crisis has reloaded the discourse about the globalised development model which is driven by the logic of gross domestic product (GDP) growth, efficiency, and profit maximisation. This is actually the third wave of growth critique which began in 1972 when the Club of Rome published *The Limits to Growth*. Then in the 1990s ecological economists and eco-feminists developed a critique of unsustainable and imperialistic patterns of overproduction and overconsumption as an alternative model for stable states and sufficiency economy (Herman Daly, Wolfgang Sachs) and a subsistence perspective (Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen).

The prevailing or proposed remedies to manage the conglomerate of crises are failing. The efforts to decouple growth of the GDP and material wealth from resource-use and emissions with the help of technology, and to increase the efficiency and commodification of natural resources and environmental services are not successful. In some sectors, increased inefficiency causes a rebound effect that offsets the environmental benefits made by new technology and leads to even more consumption. At the same time, there is no automatic link between GDP growth with employment, redistributive policies, inclusive prosperity, and the public good. On the contrary, social disparities between countries and regions and within individual societies increase as GDP grows in the wake of globalisation; the crises of social reproduction intensify.

One reason for persisting socially adverse effects is the systemic mechanism to cut and externalize social and environmental costs that grow alongside quantitative economic growth and resource exploitation. Externalization means that costs, as well as risks, are downloaded from the market and corporations to private households, local communities, and the biosphere. Internalization of costs is, however, not a simple solution to the problem. If, for example, prices include ecological costs, the retail price would increase drastically. Many goods would become unaffordable for the poor, but not make much difference to the rich. Although the internalization of costs would lead to prices that were more just ecologically speaking, it would result in a new dilemma of justice in the absence of a simultaneous transformation of social structures of injustice.

The proposal of Green Economics in the context of the forthcoming Rio+20 Conference follows a similar set of technical and monetary principles and solutions, and shapes a green washing of growth. Shifting investments and jobs from brown to green sectors, (fossil fuel-driven to renewable energy sources) in order to re-energize growth and profitability of global capital without giving priority to social, gender and environmental justice constitutes a greener variety of capitalism but not a veritable paradigm shift.

Nuclear power and the fallouts inTschernobyl and Fukushima are a metaphor for the recklessness and carelessness of unfettered growth strategies. There are no easy solutions to repair this life-threatening technology and

mode of development. A change of paradigm is inevitable which dismantles quantitative growth as a key lever for development and is based on different economic relations and human relations in societies.

In this context, feminists take up the key principles of the Women's Action Agenda 21 taken from a position paper prior to the UNCED-conference 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. The Women's Action Agenda 21 argues for a new ethics of economic activity and of the relationship with nature based on sustained livelihood. Women linked the concept of securing survival, whose starting point is the

everyday practice of provisioning, care, and social reproduction on the local level, with resource justice which includes property rights and the power to control and make decisions. It demands a remoralization of politics and the economy in light of environmental and development crises,

and equal participation rights in the process of influencing policy. These claims are still current and influence feminist thinking and envisioning other paths of development.

Presently, Spain, France, and Germany are reflection hubs about de-growth. At the same time, in Europe on the grassroots level, alternative projects and practices are revitalised or reinvented. They explore and set up new ways of social reproduction and commoning at the margins or outside of the capitalist market economy: food co-ops and guerrilla gardening, for-free shops and free book cupboards in public parks, co-operative housing, user co-operatives, and transition town projects are growing. These initiatives are practical critiques of corporate-driven globalisation with its transnational value chains of production, trade, and consumption. The alternative projects reclaim local livelihoods and regional circles of cooperation instead of the reckless global competition; they reconstruct a resource-preserving and recycling respectful relation with nature instead of the careless resource extractivism and emission increase of the growth economy.

When it comes to everyday rationality of social reproduction and alternative practices, women constitute a majority. However, the discourses about development paths are

dominated by male experts who tend to forget about the gendered structure of labour, economic institutions, and society's relation to nature.

Nonetheless, many women get involved in the debates on Buen Vivir concepts, on new prosperity and happiness indices, and on questions like: Which kind of growth do we want? How can we liberate human and social growth as well as prosperity from the tyranny of GDP growth? Which entry points can be identified to shape another development paradigm?

The growth/de-growth debate is an opportunity for feminists to connect three debates on which they focused in the recent past. These three concepts are inherently linked by their own rationales that countervail the logic of ever-lasting market growth and the preference given to accumulation of capital and material goods.

## 1. The Care Economy.

Feminist economists highlight the rationale of the care economy, based on women's unpaid work which includes social reproduction, provisioning, protection, precaution, nursing, subsistence, cooperation and reciprocity, as opposite to the growth and efficiency dogma of the markets. A crucial assumption of the neo-classical economy is that only paid labour is productive, creates value, and development. Presently, the care economy constantly subsidises the market economy, is increasingly integrated into paid labour and subjected to efficiency standards, and it is devalued and underpaid in hierarchical labour regimes.

Care work is key to giving preference to provision and need satisfaction over profit maximisation as the ultimate goal of economic activities. For this, **a redefinition of labour** including all labour outside the market, remuneration, and profitability is necessary. This would break up the hierarchical division of labour and the prevailing roles and norms of femininity and masculinity.

In highly industrialised and highly productive economies less and less people are needed to produce and trade goods. Full time jobs are turned into part-time, flexible, and precarious employment while—due to the crisis, austerity and neoliberal policies—social security and public services are cut down. The need for care work, which reproduces life, provides social security nets, responds to the growing

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**The growth/de-growth debate is an opportunity for feminists to connect the care economy, commons and commoning, and neo-liberal globalisation. These three concepts are inherently linked and act against the logic of ever lasting market growth and the preference given to accumulation of capital and material goods.**

needs of the elderly and the environment, is in many places on an increase. To rebalance this in future, **a redistribution of labour**, unpaid and paid, care and market labour is necessary. Based on the redefinition of labour, this has to go hand in hand with a revalidation of labour which overcomes traditional gender stereotypes as well as the prevailing wage gaps and income inequalities, and the devaluation of care work.

## 2. Commons and Commoning

In the context of privatisation and financialization of natural resources and public services, a whole movement emerged around **commons**. This follows Elinor Ostrom's findings about the advantages of community-driven use of resources over market and state controlled resource use.

**Commoning** means that communities define and administrate commons from forests to care

for kids, from health facilities to digital software, from food sovereignty to public transport.

Sharing of commons benefits more people if equal access for all social classes, women and men, is ensured,

**and use is regulated democratically.** Local public goods and commons can be a good prerequisite for everyone being able to realize their global social rights. On the other hand, commons and public goods must be protected from commercialisation and speculation; otherwise private capital owners and the rules of the market would decide about the common good and the enforcement of human rights and global social rights. Commons and commoning break with the logic of private property as root cause of individual greed for prosperity and accumulation, and open up space for more democratic decision-making, economic activity in solidarity and **redistributive justice**, including gender justice.

## 3. A Critique of Neoliberal Globalisation, its Production and Consumption Patterns

Following the critique of corporate-driven, resource and energy-intensive globalisation, which does not sustain its living foundations

but depletes and destroys them, **a reversal** of the obsessive industrial drive towards expansion and growth is inevitable. This should **start with a downsizing** of resource, energy, and emission-intensive **superfluous production** in the North (i.e. the automotive and the weapon industry) and its conversion into resource-sparing and recycling industries. Trade and investment liberalisation, the global race for raw materials, and financialization of resources has to be dismantled while production has to turn from export orientation to domestic markets based on local and regional economic cycles. At the same time, giving preference to caring, sustenance, and good life means that investments and labour have to be directed into the care sector, social infrastructure, and environmental restoration.

Shrinking of growth structures in production has to be accompanied by a change of consciousness and individual behaviour that now are geared at ever more consumption and an imperialistic life style based on the exploitation of human and natural resources. This refers most to global middle classes who lost a sense of sufficiency and measurement of what is enough. The North has to pioneer this move because of its historical debt with regard to emissions of greenhouse gas and exploitation of resources in the global South.

Those three cornerstones of another development paradigm—care, commons and sufficiency in production and consumption—could break up the hegemonic logic of unfettered growth and quick returns on investment. Putting the economy from its profit and speculative-driven head back onto its caring feet would also imply a reversion of the monetary system to its function of change and credit.

Occupy development means to identify along the rationale of care and sustenance development paths that are socially and environmentally just. It also means to explore transition and transformation strategies on a conceptual and practical level in a democratic, inclusive, and gender-just way. Feminists should repoliticize development issues as citizens, and stress the emancipatory potential of the caring economy, of commons, and the principle of not living at the cost of others and the nature.

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## MENA Region

### Democracy as an Alternative

Comments by Kinda  
Mohamedieh, Arab  
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## MENA Region

### Democracy as an Alternative



# Towards a New Social Contract: Declaration of Key Principles by Civil Society Organizations in the Arab Region

This article is based on the Declaration of Key Principles by Civil Society Organizations in the Arab Region: Paths towards Democratic Changes and Equitable Development in the Arab Region. Symposium participants<sup>1</sup> discussed and agreed upon five principles as necessary to the process of establishing a new social contract in the Arab region.<sup>2</sup>

These discussions came in light of the peoples' revolutions and uprisings in various Arab countries and were a continuation of ideas and proposals emerging from previous gatherings, including the regional convening entitled "Economic and Social Rights in Light of the Global Crises: What is the Alternative Development Model in the Arab region?," January 2011, Beirut, Lebanon, and another entitled "Human Rights in Democratic Transitions in the Arab Region," March 2011 in Tunis, Tunisia.

## 1. There is no substitute for a democratic civil state

The Arab revolutions are not merely a reaction to rent-seeking states or totalitarian regimes; they are also the outcome of unjust and failed social and economic policies. Thus, there is a need to establish a new relationship between citizens and the state, one that is based on economic, social, and political philosophies that are radically different than those that shaped the region previously.

Collectively, people in the region have called for a democratic civil state to be established. Such a state should be bound by a constitution, articulated by the citizens, and governed by institutions that are in line with international human rights agreements. The state should be capable of assimilating diversity in Arab communities—immunizing society against disintegration related to sectarianism, tribalism,<sup>3</sup> and various forms of religious or racist intolerance or discrimination based on race, color, or

gender. The state should also be grounded in the values of full citizenship, mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, equality, and celebration of difference. Above all, the state must be accountable to its people.

The separation of powers and the implementation of democratic elections are key elements in the transition. Decentralized, participatory, and grassroots-based approaches to democracy are key.

The military and security forces should be controlled by political civil power and exist to protect, rather than oppress or persecute, the people. Religious reform is directly associated with civil freedoms, the principle of equality, and the liberation of society from practices that glorify power, violence, and discrimination. As such, the state should be secular, and not based on primary affiliation, such as affiliations rooted in family relations, tribal, religious, and ethnic affiliations.

Civil society in all its diversity should be partners in shaping public policy and, indeed, in all economic and social decisions. Substantive participation by a wide range of civil society actors requires a legislature that safeguards civil and political freedom and ensures that laws are fashioned in the service of rights.



## 2. Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights between men and women must be at the heart of the new social contract.

A revolution that does not treat all of its citizens as equal is a defective revolution or one that risks losing its revolutionary core. Substantive equality between men and women in all spheres is fundamental to a democratic civil state and to the establishment of an alternative rights-based socio-economic model. It is, therefore, essential to reform the structures

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**It is essential to reform the structures of power, currently based on age and male domination, to ones that are grounded in equality and full citizenship.**

of power, currently based on age and male domination, to ones that are grounded in equality and full citizenship. Among other rights, the right to

decent employment and social protection must be guaranteed to all citizens, men and women. Women must play a substantive role in shaping the development vision and its implementation.

## 3. The Region is in need of alternative socio-economic models, prioritizing a just and comprehensive development.

As the economic policies of previous regimes have aggravated differences among classes and social groups, disrupted social structures, and distorted the foundations of social and national unity, an in-depth revision of economic and development policies—which have failed thus far to achieve progress, stability, prosperity, and equitable development—must be carried out.

Social and economic policies, indeed the development paradigm, must be shaped by principles of justice, equality, and dignity and must be in the service of human rights. International experiences in democratic transitions and social justice struggles—including discussions around the concept and goals of development—could offer useful insights for the development of local experiences and trajectories.

It is critical that development projects (and indeed, the development vision) in Arab states hold a regional dimension grounded in economic policies that are in line with the right to development, and do not simply promote market liberalization.

## The state's role in growth and development

The state has two functions: to regulate production and market forces; and to protect national interests, including guaranteeing the rights of all particularly vulnerable groups. In order to ensure peace, achieve just development, and safeguard social unity, the state must redistribute resources and wealth between social and productive forces, fight monopolies, and ensure transparency and accountability within state institutions and the private sector.

Securing economic and social rights is one of the central goals of the Arab revolutions and a fundamental complement to civil and political rights. It is the state's responsibility to respect, protect, and guarantee these rights including particularly equitable access to quality transportation, health, education, energy, water, housing, and social protection. Individual and collective freedoms, including the freedom of belief, thought, and association must also be guaranteed. All public policies should be in the service of these rights.

## Rebuilding the policies of the productive sector

The productive sector refers to the dynamic job-generating production cycles in agriculture, industry, and services. The need to support the productive sectors—particularly those related to agriculture and industry—is paramount. Monetary and financial policies as well as policies related to trade, investment, and taxation should serve the dynamic growth of productive sector and be formulated in line with human rights, including the right to employment, food, and development.

The private sector must actively participate in development but within the framework of social responsibilities based on development that is sustainable, in line human rights, and protects the environment. Within this context, the state's partnerships with the private sector should encompass a broad spectrum of small and medium enterprises and businesses, and should not be limited to cooperation with large international, regional, or national private sector actors. The interests of these do not always coincide with national interests, owing to the nature of their capital and its globalized economic activity.

## Regional and international partnerships and relations

It is essential to make information on loans and international aid easily accessible, and to ensure that aid is in the service of an alternative (as described above) socio-economic and development model. Among other requirements, this means the removal of external policy conditions tied to loans and aid and supporting national decision making.

The Arab revolutions provided a pathway for the establishment of new relationships with international actors in the region. A review of Arab states' relationships with other Arab states, the United Nations and international development and financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, must be carried out. Civil society must be a key partner in these discussions.

## 4. Constitutional Reforms.

It is necessary that the constitution itself defines the civil aspect of the state and provides guarantees for its establishment. Whether new constitutions are drafted or amended, safeguards

to protect the social and economic rights of the people—including explicit reference to these rights within constitutions—are required. Mechanisms to enforce such protection must be developed and implemented.

There is also a need to ensure that the constitution guarantees:

- respect for human rights obligations;
- equal distribution of wealth;
- genuine political diversity;
- a separation of powers;
- protection of the consumer;
- protection of the right to information and freedom to circulate information; and
- to fight corruption.

Social justice principles and the social dimension of the state's role, aspects that are missing from current constitutions of Arab states, must be enumerated within new constitutions.

Furthermore, constitutional reforms should guarantee a civil relationship between the army and the police, on the one hand, and the state and the citizen on the other. This relationship

should be based on human rights outlined in the UN's international treaties and conventions and in the universal principles of justice and the right to life and freedoms.

Equality between men and women should be guaranteed through various institutional, legislative, and constitutional reforms. This includes examining election laws and political parties' regulations as well as political, legislative, civil, educational, and media institutions. International conventions related to the abolishment of all forms of discrimination against women must be upheld and enforced.

Serious judicial reform, resulting in an independent judiciary system capable of grappling with violations of rights and their subsequent restitution, must be undertaken. As noted above, the transition to a democratic civil state requires reforming institutions and reexamining their role, beginning with determining those responsible for the measures taken under former regimes.

## 5. Civil Society and Community Groups must be at the heart of the democratic and development transition.

Youth played a pivotal role in the peoples' revolutions in the Arab region. They were the motivating force for many other social groups, helping to shed the fear complex and push for radical change in several Arab states. The role of youth necessitates their participation in the democratic transition process and in the economic cycles of countries in transition. Their employment should be prioritized and their challenges and priorities taken into account.

Women and women's groups were partners in initiating the revolutions in the Arab region; they must also be partners in establishing the future. The recommendations of women's groups, in all their diversity, must shape the vision of the Arab state going forward. Change must tackle and dismantle patriarchal and authoritative relationships with women, as well as youth and children.

The rights of workers, farmers, small producers, and other wage earners form the cornerstone of community building—and the establishment of a democratic political system and viable economic system. The rights of these groups were eroded over the past several decades, due, in large part, to structural reforms—and they must be reestablished.

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Trade union movements also played a significant role in some Arab countries in advancing the revolutions. Considering their vital standing as representatives of wage earners and other worker groups, trade unions and syndicates should be main actors and partners in policy-making. They must remain independent of the state and democratic within. Protecting the gains of the revolution is a key role for unions: their role is crucial in terms of organizing the labor force, addressing wage policies, social protection, and productivity.

Revolutions in the Arab region presented models of collective mobilization and formation of popular will that transcended ideological tensions and partisan polarization. Open dialogue must continue because it is a vital instrument for the protection of revolutions and the realization of their goals, and for achieving accord among political and social forces without relinquishing basic rights.

For more information on positions on development issues by civil society organizations from the Arab region see:

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## End Notes

1. The Symposium was held in Cairo, Egypt from 29-30 May 2011 and had participants from the following countries: Jordan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, Egypt, Palestine.

2. The full declaration from the meeting can be read at: <http://www.annd.org/previousnews.php>

3. Tribalism refers here to the association of individuals with ethnic, cultural, and familial affiliations, which often creates social distinctions between individuals. This is rooted in the well-established role of tribes in Arab societies and history.

- Position statement entitled “Aid Supporting the People’s Revolutions should not Restrict the Democratic Transition; A Call Against Diverting the Revolutions’ Economic and Social Justice Goals through the role of IMF, WB, EIB and EBRD” (June 2011). This statement was supported by over 65 organizations and was widely covered by media groups in the region. Available at: [www.annd.org/previousnews.php](http://www.annd.org/previousnews.php)
- “Aid effectiveness and development paths in the Arab region; Key Demands Raised by a Number of Civil Society Groups from the Arab Region”; developed in the course preparations for the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (November 2011). Available at: [www.annd.org/previousnews.php](http://www.annd.org/previousnews.php)
- “Human Rights Core to Democratic Changes and Equitable Development; Lessons of the Popular Tunisian Revolution and the Responsibilities of the Arab Civil Society” (March 2011). Available at: [www.annd.org/previousnews.php](http://www.annd.org/previousnews.php)

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international 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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IDeA aims to amplify the voices of women's rights advocates and organizations in key development discussions. We build alliances and plan strategies with our partners to influence development policy and practices. Our team also produces and disseminates resource materials to increase the capacity of women's groups to engage in economic and development policy processes.

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