
TOWARDS A FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY

Inter Pares Occasional Papers Series

Inter Pares is a Canadian organization dedicated to promoting international social justice. In Canada and overseas we work to build understanding about the causes and effects of poverty and injustice, and the need for social change. We support communities in developing countries to create healthy, safe and secure futures. We support people's struggles for self-determination and their efforts to challenge structural obstacles to change and their alternative development approaches.

Towards A Feminist Political Economy

This paper is the fruit of an ongoing process of collaborative reflection and action within Inter Pares and among several close counterparts and colleagues in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and was prepared as part of a collaborative editorial process among the Inter Pares staff team. The principal writer is Inter Pares staff member Brian Murphy.

A fundamental rupture that defines human history is the primordial “otherness” constructed on the basis of gender and biology. Common to all societies are the social, cultural and political distinctions between men and women – including the stereotypical essentialization of the qualities and characteristics of women and men – and the domination of men and subordination of women.

So globally universal is the rule of men – patriarchy – in the home, in the assembly, in the field, and in the marketplace, that this dominance and its attendant subordination of women is seen to be “normal”. Indeed, it is a universal norm even in modern, liberal and “liberated” societies such as our own.

However, it is not just. It is not healthy, for women certainly, but neither for men. It is not healthy for the planet. And contrary to the induced consciousness of men and

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women both, it is not natural. It is an aberrant perversity against the human possibility. The crimes committed in all societies against women, the daily institutionalized violence against women, the dehumanization of

woman, is a profound crime against humanity. It is at the heart of all fundamentalisms, at the core of militarism, and defines the daily context of the permanent emergency experienced by billions of woman and children around the world. A serious politics of global transformation and social change has to include the active goal of ending gender-based violence and inhumanity against women and children, and the transformation of patriarchy into an authentic inclusive democracy of all persons undefined by gender or sexuality.

For almost three decades, gender-based analysis and a feminist approach to methodology and programming have been direct and central within Inter Pares’ activity.¹ At the same time, Inter Pares does not regard “women” or

“women’s issues” as merely a sectoral issue or category. We consider the struggle for equality as a primary and fundamental independent variable that infuses our thinking and our activity. In this, borrowing from Andrea Dworkin and bell hooks, among others, we have defined equality as “one universal and common standard of dignity and opportunity for all, regardless of gender, of race, or of class.” This paper offers an elaboration of how this theme can inform and infuse international social justice activism.

Feminist Analysis in Development Programming

A profound analysis of poverty and injustice needs to be rooted in an understanding of unequal power relations – between and within North and South, rich and poor, ethnic groups, and women and men. It is upon the recognition and repudiation of these inequitable power relations that efforts at supporting social transformation are constructed. Overcoming the subordination that one suffers at the hands of another – the oppression of and violence against women by men, the social and economic exclusion of the poor by the wealthy, the marginalization of indigenous peoples by dominant ethnic groups – is not only a goal important for subordinated groups themselves. It is, as critically, an essential element for the development of an authentically democratic political culture and society. This goal is pertinent to any social space, be it a public, democratically-accountable institution, a political party, an NGO or a popular organization.

As a concept, “gender” is not synonymous with “women”. The concept developed out of the recognition of the historical, social, political and economic oppression and

marginalization of women, made possible by the construction of male and female identities and roles flowing

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from a masculine value system based on dynamics of power and domination. The significance of the concept of gender is that in making visible women's subordination in the power differential between men and women, there arises the potential for the construction of new and transformed relations

among women and men. This implies changes for both men and women, and changes in the social and material world they share.

Both women and men, from this perspective, must have the right and opportunity to challenge oppression by rejecting or transforming prescribed roles within society. This includes the right of women and men to challenge and transform outdated and dysfunctional sexual divisions of labour, and develop new norms of human relations and social solidarity.

Given women's historic subordination, it also implies that women must have the opportunity to engage in processes of personal and collective growth that permit women to challenge the diverse forms of subordination that affect them, and develop the capacity to take power and control over their own lives, their organizations, and their specific cultural, economic, political and social context.

An integral and indispensable element of this concept of women's empowerment is autonomy. Autonomy signifies the capacity and freedom to decide, to give one's opinion, and to act. It is the result of a process of humanization of relationships previously based on subordination, oppression and domination. Autonomy, then, signifies the authentic possibility of a woman to define herself for herself, and by herself, and not as an appendix of others – be it the State, the Church, political parties, or any other organization that regiments the lives of women without taking into consideration their essential being as individuals and persons – nor as a depersonalized function of the family and the community. This conceptualization does not isolate women's roles and identities from the rest of society, but it does require an understanding of the social manipulation and domination to which women have historically been subjected. Neither does it put into question the necessity and desirability of relationships of reciprocity, but posits that true reciprocity is based on egalitarian and

humanized relationships among free and autonomous people, women and men.

Asymmetrical power relations between men and women must be understood in their appropriate historical and cultural contexts, and within the dynamics of continual change and reinvention that occur in all vibrant and living cultures. Within the contemporary social context in most countries in the world there exist important and dynamic elements that promote empowerment, autonomy and a transformation of gender-based roles and relations among women and men. These possibilities create the circumstances to construct new parameters for a better quality of life for everyone, and ought to be supported.

In a study for Inter Pares and the Project Counselling Service that explored the impact on women and society in Latin America of the massive social and economic dislocation caused by several decades of civil conflict and armed violence, our Peruvian colleague, Gladys Acosta,² wrote that "the 'chaos' that results [from extended civil conflict], while being destructive of the social fabric, also contains possibilities for a humanist transformation between genders, in their desire to transcend confrontation and struggle for survival." Gladys pointed out, however, that for these situations of crisis to lead to actual activities for the transformation of power relations, continuous efforts have to be made to acknowledge and make visible the differential impacts that the same situation can have for women and for men. And consistent and coherent interventions must be made to support women in their efforts to initiate and consolidate their own organizations.

While opening political and social space for women is crucial for the development of individual women in societies, it is also essential to the development of authentic democratic norms and structures that include the perspectives of all citizens. Women are asserting that public debate should concentrate not only on economic, political and social themes, but also should make visible those issues previously considered "private", such as sexual violence, and voluntary motherhood.

In her study, Gladys Acosta explained how the social, political and economic marginalization of women is made possible by a value system based on dynamics of power and domination. Inherent in this reality, she explained, is the corresponding potential to construct transformed power relations among women and men, implying changes for both men and women and for society as a whole. These two aspects are fundamental, then, to a feminist gender analysis. It is a concept used to describe and analyze the dynamic interactions among the masculine and

feminine dimensions of specific social goals. It is also a methodology of work to develop a new social consciousness and norms of interaction among women and men in establishing and working toward common social goals.

Gender in program methodology

Gender analysis is predicated on the explicit recognition that unequal power relations, and the concomitant subordination of women historically, have constituted a primary organizing principle of society. Therefore, we do not view gender analysis and work with women as isolated issues or as simply one “component” of programming. Rather, the analysis assumes that a gender perspective will be incorporated as an integral aspect of all programmatic interventions. A gender perspective in programming implies taking on the twin goals of justice and equality among women and men. In pursuit of this goal, women’s distinct worldviews and perspectives have to be made visible, socialized, and perceived as being valid, worthy of respect, consideration and public discussion.

As in other human rights and anti-poverty interventions, it is crucial to develop a critical understanding of the material and cultural context within which gender-based power structures and dynamics exist. This understanding is indispensable to our capacity to responsibly accompany women and men as they analyze their situations and make choices, and particularly when they decide to challenge oppressive patriarchal structures in their societies. Since women are well aware of the dangers and backlash that can occur when male power is challenged, program methodology needs to allow for and facilitate women’s efforts to determine whether and how such challenges to the status quo can be made safely and effectively, and to determine the pace at which any such changes or challenges are made. In discussing their situation, for example, women may want to talk about such issues as male violence against women and children, including psychological abuse, assault, child abuse, and rape – issues which women will generally not raise in the presence of men. Because of this, program interventions have to allow women themselves to decide when and how to include men as participants in their process of understanding and challenging male power and behavior, and the material effects of their oppression.

Since the world as women experience it often goes unreported and is obscured, program methodology based on an understanding of gender relations actively seeks out the perspectives of women regarding local resources, local knowledge and local technology. Unless a program specifically and consciously expands to authentically

address the lives and perspectives of women, it will focus on the lives and perspectives of men. There is no gender-neutral perspective. Because the pervasive discrimination against women makes it so difficult for women to take their place as partners and colleagues integral to the actions we support, it is necessary to develop interventions that specifically respond to women’s particular needs for health care, education, independent organization and empowerment.

A methodological approach to specific work with women, then, may begin with an effort to identify the unique role and contributions of women within a particular society. This involves, simultaneously, a critical appreciation of the conditions of women’s lives – their work in both the formal and informal labour markets, their efforts within the domestic sphere, their health and access to education and opportunities, their participation in shaping the direction of their communities.

This element promotes a process of self-affirmation of the individual contribution of each woman, and a collective social project to propose transformations in the existing social order. This then can lead to an identification of the unique challenges that women confront, a recognition that allows the consideration of the daily domestic realities that form women’s social universe and the context of their needs, as women themselves perceive them. This is especially critical in situations of radical dislocation. While there is a rupture in the external and internal world of both women and men, the process of re-composition of those worlds must be differentiated and individual.

A third element of this methodological approach involves the consideration of the particular needs of women to ensure their full and creative participation in social, cultural, political and economic life. Necessities such as education and health, in its fullest sense (including psychological recuperation), must clearly be addressed. These services are necessary to ensure that women are in a position to construct bases of political, social and economic autonomy which permit them to articulate their own strategic interests, as well as to identify the mixed-gender groups with which women can work in solidarity to support efforts to transform power relations within their societies.

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Finally, this methodological approach critically examines the differential impact on women and men of all interventions aimed at supporting community development, and attempts to ensure that women are equal and active participants in, and beneficiaries of, these initiatives.

Gender Equality: Towards a Feminist Political Economy

Prevailing development theory and practice tends to be profoundly economic and reductionist. In this, the economics applied tends to deal with “undifferentiated man”, and to treat the objects of economics in a gender-neutral fashion or, when it treats women, to essentialize women as a universal and homogenous sub-category. This observation is equally accurate for political science.

A “political economy” approach treats economics as an extension of politics and relations of power as they influence the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, as well as the (political) management of these economic variables, relationships and functions. In doing this, political economy treats economics as a sub-set of society and social relations, emphasizing how the relationships within a society influence production of goods and services, and the distribution and re-distribution of wealth and assets.

The most important distinction for our purposes is that traditional economics treats people and societies as functions of economics, which is primary; political economy, on the other hand, treats economics as a function of people and their societies, influenced by the particulars of social and political relationships and structures of power.

A political economic framework reveals and clarifies how gender determines or influences the social and political relationships and structures of power, and the differential economic effects that flow from these relationships and structures. This approach also implies deconstructing and re-framing basic economic constructs and assumptions. This includes, for example, treating social production and reproduction as at least as important as the production of goods, commodities and other forms of material wealth; and measuring value – for example of labour, or mutual support networks – in ways more complex and dynamic than traditional economic input/output categories.

Values-based investigation and descriptive analysis

Girls and women remain the primary family caregivers, starting at a very early age and continuing throughout their lives. We need to promote in our work a values-based, and value-clarifying, investigation and descriptive analysis that emphasizes the actual lived experience of women and

their families and the elements of life, community and social relations that matter most to them and determine the conditions of their lives.

This implies, naturally, a more holistic approach to economics and to community development and capacity-building. It implies, as well, an emphasis on social definitions of what it means to be a human being, rather than merely economic definers and qualifiers.

It also implies that the approach to programming and to action-research emphasizes qualitative analysis, which increasingly is the significant stream even in more formalistic academic research. Qualitative analysis tends to be inductive, building from the felt needs and lived experiences of people through their direct reporting and descriptions. Rather than research questions identified in the abstract and investigated by outsiders, this approach elicits both the questions and the hypotheses through thematic investigation carried out with the participants themselves, as political subjects – rather than as objects of investigation, analysis and social engineering.

In this approach, there is critical attention to the “affect” – that is, how people feel and experience their lives – as well as the “effect”. Indeed, affect – felt experience, perception, emotion, motivation, affinities, values – is considered to be a resource, as well as a concrete material effect to be considered, monitored and developed. Quality of life, and the specific qualities that enhance life, become the object of investigation and program interventions. And while economic variables remain critical, many of the elements and variables identified are only peripherally economic.

The “millennium development goals” definition of poverty at a universal US\$2/day is simply silly, a fact acknowledged by many observers five years into the process. But more critically, this definition based on income excludes entirely the dimensions of human life that are most critical to study and to transform.

Dilemmas and limits of classical economic analysis

In taking into account the limits of conventional economics, development practitioners focus most often on what mainstream economics treats, and scrutinize whether this

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treatment is adequate and accurate. We tend to focus less on what mainstream economics ignores and obscures.

Economics as it prevails today is not an open system that examines without

prejudice all phenomena of production, distribution and exchange. Modern economics, as Heilbroner³ points out, is exclusively the theory and study of the mechanics of capitalism – which is assumed to be all there is. This truncated discipline does not have the tools even to see and identify many of the elements of the “informal” economy – including non-monetarized economic arrangements, production and relationships, such as growing and sharing food, cooperative childcare, bartering services, etc. Much less can it describe and analyze the mechanics and norms of the informal economy, many of which are norms of mutual support and cultural action rather than of acquisition and accumulation.⁴

In this sense, traditional economics is less a science of investigation than an ideological system of rationalization and prescription. And what it ignores and obscures is at least as important as what it reveals and explains.

Social reproduction: meaning, significance and implications

One of the most critical areas left out of traditional economics is the area of what has become known as “social reproduction”: child bearing, parenting, nutrition and nurturance; youth education and mentoring; maintenance of family and community relationships and nurturance; preserving and conserving social affinities and mutual support networks and community structures; reciprocal relationships of care for the ill and the elderly. There is an entire universe of complex actions and dynamics upon which society, including the “economics” of society, fundamentally rely, but which are largely left out of the equations and investigations of reductionist economics.

This gap has been challenged to some good effect from the left for over 30 years, for instance, through the “reproductive labour” approach of feminist scholars such as Mary O’Brien,⁵ or Marilyn Waring’s work on the inclusion of social reproduction in domestic product accounts, and more recently on time-use.⁶ But this approach, while bringing the issue of social reproduction to the fore, has at the same time reinforced some of the critical weaknesses of conventional economics by adhering to and promoting the same hyper-materialist – in this case, Marxist – essentialization of “reproductive labour” as but one more category of labour and production within a very limited economic paradigm. If it’s not productive, and a contribution to society, defined as a measurable output in terms of consumption or the production of wealth, then it’s not valuable. This approach still defines everything in terms of production, and economic measurements, and re-jigs the reductionist equations to include this activity, now called “social reproduction”⁷

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But not everything that is valuable can be measured and reduced to an equation, and not everything in an equation is necessarily valuable. In our analysis, we need to transcend this limitation to identify and value social activity in its own terms and within its own broader framework, rather than in terms reduced to economic categories and measurements.

The nature and significance of social cohesion

In this regard, social cohesion is a critical element. It is both a goal and a pre-condition of any meaningful and sustainable development initiative. In the context of peace-building, reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction – the context in many of the places where Inter Pares and other international NGOs are active – social cohesion can be seen as a unifying construct around which almost all interventions have to be framed and measured.

Social cohesion in this context refers to the integrity and wholeness of communities, and of the larger societies of which communities are part. Such cohesion is measured in terms of social reciprocity and solidarity, the structures and norms of mutual support and care, and the strength, breadth and depth of social affinities – for example, the extent to which affinities extend beyond the very local, or the clan. This construct also takes into account the quality and qualities of identity integral to social cohesion. For example, is identity defined in inward, marginal and exclusive terms – the cohesion of “in-groups” and “out-groups” – and protected by withholding membership? Or is identity expressed in more open, embracing, inclusive and expansive terms, reaching out to others rather than defending the imagined boundaries of exclusive identity, duty, and privilege?

Integral to this “social cohesion” perspective is the integration of elements and variables that are independent of economic context. From our perspective, a crucial and universal example lies in domestic violence against women and children, which is ubiquitous in the world. Added to this constant scourge are communal violence, civil strife, open warfare, as well as vulnerability to other forms of crime and coercion. All of these are at least as significant definers of quality of life as are any economic factors, and all of them influence the capacity of people to do what is necessary to maintain and consolidate basic sustenance itself. Other such variables are political and

religious repression, constraints of civil and human rights and liberties, and industrial and environmental degradation.

This notion of social cohesion extends directly into the sphere of formal economics. A feminist political economy

Social cohesion refers to the wholeness of communities, and of the larger societies of which they are part, measured in terms of reciprocity and solidarity.

concerns itself with the economics of groups – families, communities, neighbourhoods, localities and regions – as well as individuals. It does its investigation from a perspective that sees people and their affinity circles not as “units”, for example, of production,

or of consumption – cogs in an economic machine – but as social, political, and economic subjects or agents. And it looks at people’s whole lives, and their social, cultural and political integration.

Livelihood analysis

The aspect of this approach that has progressed the furthest within mainstream approaches is what has become known as livelihood analysis. Livelihood analysis includes and takes into account in a holistic manner all of the integrated activity that makes up the sustenance and maintenance of life and growth. A “good livelihood” denotes a good and healthy way of being. It includes productive and income-generating activity, but is not restricted to these, taking into account as well the general well-being and quality of life of the individual and her family, the assets available to the family in times of stress, the quality and security of sustenance and habitat, and the social and cultural environment and infrastructure, including goods and services shared in common within a community. Taking livelihoods into account, rather than merely income or consumption measured in units, involves an integrated, horizontal, qualitative and long-term approach to investigation and intervention.

It follows that a feminist political economy approach also focuses on household economies, and home economics, a field of investigation and intervention that is gaining momentum in official international development circles.⁸ The strength of a vulnerabilities/assets framework that takes into account the fulsome scope of livelihood issues at the domestic level – households *and* local economies – is critical to promoting long-term, sustainable transformation in the conditions of people’s lives.

Livelihoods comprise the intersection or nexus of the private and the public domains, the domestic and the communal.

Households do not exist in isolation, nor do families; they live in a social, economic and political context and environment. Households depend upon, and sustain, local economies of production, consumption and exchange.

Critical to any local economy is the extent to which income and wealth, including productive assets, generated by people in the community remains in that economy, and circulates within that community. When people have to leave the community to secure a livelihood, a significant proportion of their income, and energy, is spent outside the community and remains outside the community. They also have less time, energy and resources to contribute to building and nurturing the social networks and norms that sustain community. While the work they do may assist in family survival, it does not contribute to the development and consolidation of community and livelihood in the broader sense discussed above. Indeed, dispersal of labour and economic activity outside the locality tends to undermine local economies and sustainable livelihoods at the same time as it (temporarily) maintains or even increases daily domestic consumption. The experience of workers in concentrated free trade industrial zones over the past twenty years has clearly demonstrated this effect.

One conclusion has to be that we need to develop and incorporate into development theory and practice, broader and more subtle measures and indicators of sustainable livelihoods, domestic security and general community well-being, measures and indicators that go beyond reductionist indices of income and consumption.⁹ Measuring family income in US dollars per day, and individual consumption based on average calorie and Vitamin A intake, gives absolutely no clue as to the real experience of people, and obscures the most critical quality of life issues.

Labour, work and action

Hannah Arendt long ago drew some valuable distinctions among labour, work and action.¹⁰ Labour is the activity of life and living itself, to sustain life – at root, biological (she sometimes called it “natural”) activity and energy. Work, on the other hand, is activity that makes – or manufactures – things. Labour is often commodified, sold to gain an income. Work also can be an economic resource, directed to self-sustaining productive or commercial activity, the manufacture of goods and commodities. Action, finally, is interpretive, collaborative, innovative and transformative. Action is imagination and invention, and can be social, political, cultural, artistic or any combinations of these. Action is intention asserted on the future to influence and change it.

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Labour sustains life; work invents and manufactures; action changes the world. In the healthy person – in what Arendt called the “active life” – labour, work and action are integrated. Livelihood analysis perceives and analyses the extent of this integration, and suggests the means to promote it.

These constructs are important because in a holistic perspective, lives and livelihoods are integrated, as are labour, work and action, so that sustaining life and community is cultural action, rather than cultural disintegration. Traditional family agri-culture is the most easily understood paradigm of this integration, as are some of the traditional artisanal activities such as weaving, or primary resource gathering such as fishing. But these traditional activities are often romanticized and essentialized, and the real extent to which they are authentically integrated varies from place-to-place and time-to-time. There is no reason in the modern world of urban work in manufacturing and services that integration cannot still be sought and attained.

Still, in the transition to wage economies from traditional primary economic activity integrated as cultural action, there has been a fundamental alienation of people from their own labour, as labour and labourers are commodified, atomized, disengaged from tangible products, and reified outside the domestic life and soul of labourers themselves, who are no longer in control of their labour, or the products of their labour.

At the same time, as wage labour is commodified, unpaid labour and work – in the sense of energy and life forces devoted to social action, invention and production – have been obscured and minimized in economic frameworks. Examples include child bearing and parenting – by women and men – and other forms of domestic and community maintenance, caring and nurturance, or other “unproductive” (meaning non-income generating) cultural action, such as art and other forms of cultural and spiritual expression and interaction.

Labour, work and social action outside of the conventional economic framework create precisely the milieu that makes economic work itself meaningful, and possible. It is these elements, integrated with work, that sustain livelihoods and communities. These elements have to be central

in the thinking and considerations of social development interventions.

Migration: strategies for survival and prosperity

As people are increasingly alienated from their own work and their own communities, and are forced to go further and further afield to sell their labour for survival of themselves and their families, we see the phenomenon of strategic migration develop as a fundamental and systematic survival strategy for families and communities. In itself, this is not a new phenomenon. Still, the contemporary manifestation is a critical element of what is now called economic globalization, and a dramatic effect of development itself.

The mistake commonly made is that economic migration is haphazard, individual and a break with the community. While of course this is frequently true, economic migration generally occurs in deliberate and planned dispersions in increasingly wide concentric circles to nearby cities, to provincial and national capitals, and then to major economic centres of the global metropolises. The family, and in many senses, the community, continue to exist as economic entities and as mutual support networks, across space and time, with migrant labour and home remittances now integral tactics in family and community survival strategies, and even in community development strategies.

This is critical, as migration continues to form one of the major fault lines in global politics and development. Migration has to be analyzed and understood within the framework of livelihood analysis and household economics, and the positive and negative dynamics of migration made more visible, understood and appreciated, so the positive elements of this strategy can be nurtured and reinforced while its negative effects are mitigated.

When household and community supports deteriorate and force families and communities into exploiting economic opportunities increasingly far removed from their own locality, strategic labour migration is inevitable. A critical negative impact of labour migration lies in the reality that it is the younger generation that leaves, and so entire communities, indeed societies, are becoming bereft of their most dynamic, creative and productive resource – their young people. In a vicious circle, this reality, even as it serves the community temporarily, represents an increasingly catastrophic loss that obviates the prospects of long-term community renewal. It undermines and erodes social solidarity and cohesion, as communities are gutted of their vitality, and the aging and aged are left to fend for themselves. And because it is most often men and boys who migrate –

along with young women without children – households headed by single mothers become the norm, and these women have to assume alone the tasks and responsibility of maintaining family and community. For many families, of course, home remittances stave off misery and allow them to purchase commodities and even some services such as health and education. But this income can only postpone immanent collapse of local communities unless something is done to ensure that labour migration is tactical and temporary and that the local community, with its networks of social solidarity and cohesion, along with the livelihood opportunities, infrastructure and generational renewal to sustain it, are developed and maintained.

The value of community is beyond measurement, visible only in its final absence.

The social, political and economic significance of inter-generational discontinuity, and the effects of the erosion of extended kinship networks of affinity, nurturance, and care, cannot be overestimated.

When these elements are destroyed, they are gone forever and will never be replaced. Communities that have died cannot be revived. Like old growth forest, or animal and plant species, community is invaluable and irreplaceable. Even in base utilitarian economic terms, the value of the social and reproductive function of community is beyond measurement, visible only in its final absence.

Without these qualities – without functioning, vibrant, flourishing communities and local economies able to support and sustain viable and humane livelihoods – there is no development. Development strategies that do not nurture community, that destroy community, leave poor people increasingly alone, isolated and desolate. Such “development” is to be resisted and exposed.

Blocks to women’s political and economic equality, mobility and opportunity

In the present situation faced by societies and people around the world, there is a pervasive destruction of community, social solidarity and social cohesion, in the name of development and progress. Until the approaches and attitudes described above become fundamental within global development processes promoted nationally, internationally and multilaterally, the situation will only get worse.

Two facts are clear. First, the injustice and social destruction we are seeing in the world is fundamentally predicated on the systematic exploitation and violation of women and

their rights as autonomous human beings. It is contributing to a deepening of the systemic and ideological barriers that exist to women’s social, political and economic equality, their mobility and their opportunity to live full, free and exuberant lives.

Second, unless this is changed, and the potential, leadership and agency of women is encouraged as a first priority – systematically and universally – it will be impossible to turn the machine of progress around and transform the processes of progress into harmonizing, life-giving, life-promoting, humane and sustainable development.

In the meantime, we need to resist and transform the economy of exploitation, and specifically the economy of sexual exploitation – of sweatshop labour; of prostitution and trafficking; of slavery; of domestic poverty, oppression and violence. This is a first and necessary step in changing the conditions into which the majority of human beings are born and raised, and in which the majority still live.

Endnotes

- ¹ For Inter Pares, the distinction between gender analysis and a feminist approach is that gender analysis makes visible the material conditions of oppression based on gender and the power differential among men and women, while feminism envisions an alternative reality and identifies structures and norms that need to be transformed to bring it about, along with processes and strategies through which this transformation might begin to be achieved.
- ² Gladys Acosta Vargas, *La Perspectiva de Género en los Programas de Desplazamiento de la Consejería en Proyectos para Refugiados Latinoamericanos* (Colombia), PCS, November, 1995.
- ³ See Heilbroner, Robert, *Teachings from the Worldly Philosophy*, Norton, New York, 1996.
- ⁴ See Esteva, Gustavo and Madhu Suri Prakash, "Beyond development, what?", in *Development in Practice*, Oxfam GB/Oxford Press, Vol. 8, No. 3, August 1998, pp. 280-296.
- ⁵ See, for example O'Brien, Mary, *Reproducing The World: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado: 1989; and *The Politics of Reproduction*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London: 1981.
- ⁶ See Waring, Marilyn, *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*, Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1988; as well as *Three Masquerades*, Auckland University Press, Auckland: 1996. At the same time, Waring herself remains critical of the notion of imputing value, conceding that "sometimes you're forced to use a tool you don't like to attract the attention you need." (interview with Dr. Cathy Cavanaugh, Athabasca University, Jan. 1998).
- ⁷ While Social Indicators are now being generated by many northern governments, as well as multilateral organizations such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), World Bank, and the UN system, there is general acknowledgement that they remain problematic, and their use in the development or evaluation of public policy interventions remains virtually nil in the north, let alone in development interventions in the south.
- ⁸ See for example, González de la Rocha, Mercedes, and Alejandro Grinspun, "Private Adjustments: Household Responses to the Erosion of Work", in *Negotiating Poverty, New Directions, Renewed Debate*, Pluto Books, London, 2001, pp. 89-134. The essay presents conclusions from the review of a series of 15 country studies financed by the Poverty Strategies Initiative of the UNDP, conducted between 1997 and 2000. The review adopted the "assets-vulnerability" analytical framework developed by Caroline Moser, see Moser, Caroline, *Confronting Crisis, A Comparative Study of Household Responses to Poverty and Vulnerability*, Environmentally Sustainable Development Studies and Monograph Series No. 8, World Bank, Washington D.C., 1996.
- ⁹ While considerable work has been done in this area by some academics and research institutions – see for example, Pettman, Jan Jindy, *Worlding Women, A Feminist Internationalist Politics*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, and Andrews, Caroline et alia, *Studies in Political Economy: Developments in Feminism*, Women's Press, Toronto, 2003 – this discourse has not yet begun to permeate in a significant way the analyses nor – especially – the actual practices of international social development interveners.
- ¹⁰ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1998, originally published 1958.



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