

Development

gender and economic justice

Volume 55 • Number 3 • September 2012

Special issue in partnership with AWID

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Correspondence

Editorial correspondence should be sent to the SID Editorial Team, Via Ardeatina, 802, 00178, Rome, Italy.

E-mail: development@sidint.org

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Development Citizenship for Change

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Editorial: No Economic Justice without Gender Justice

WENDY HARCOURT

It seems incredible in these days of economic crisis that over 2,200 women (and some men) found the time and money to fly to Istanbul for a discussion on gender and economic justice at the AWID Forum 2012. Registrations closed a week before the event opened and the majority of the 800 organizations and individuals who answered the call for sessions and papers could not be accommodated.

Like many who attended, I spent months preparing for the event. With AWID, I organized in autumn a special meeting to plan this journal issue. I contributed to designing and participating in three of the sessions. And in the weeks in the run up to the event, I was continually promising my network of colleagues and friends that we would meet up in Istanbul to plot, to listen to each other's sessions, or find a corner somewhere to catch up. Like many others, I came to Istanbul to learn, to find and renew friendships, to be energized and to plan for the future. AWID Forums are special, highly charged, inclusive and exciting.

The secret of their success is that, in the end, they are not events but the converging of many processes. The making and attending of an AWID Forum is part of a complex networking process that brings together different generations of feminists in a space to engage, to share and create. The *Development* journal has been fortunate to publish now three special editions covering the outcome of the AWID Forum¹ working with the ever more international and dynamic AWID team.

This journal issue is packed with insights. Cindy Clark and Lydia Alpizar Durán give a sizzling overview in their introduction of the main issues of the Forum from the epicentre of the Forum arrangements. The other articles in the Upfront section present highlights from the plenaries and in-depth sessions. Articles based on stirring speeches reflect new forms of activism and urgency in today's crisis hung world. From the defiant revolutionary poem by Marwa Sharafeldin, to the talk of a fierce new world by Gita Sen and Marilyn Waring's crisp critique of economic power; from Christa Wichterich's urging to occupy development, to Rhadika Balakrishnan plea for popular education, and the warnings of the misuse of culture by Yakin Ertürk, we sense a new dynamism and activism as women confront economic and social inequalities. Jayati Ghosh completes the section when she argues it is time for feminists to enter into the discussion of alternatives more forcefully in order to define how economic institutions and policies can ensure a gender-just economy and society.

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The Thematic section pushes further into how this engagement might happen with a series of articles setting out the structural reasons for the economic injustices that are impeding women's lives. Feminist economists, most of whom spoke at the AWID Forum, go to the core of economic processes in order to give a gender reading of financialization of our lives; the impact of neo-liberal economic policies on women's employment; social protection policies; taxes; balancing family life; funding for women's rights, environment, well-being and livelihoods.

The Dialogue section details a vision of change by setting out feminist alternative visions to the mainstream economic development model. The three articles present: how AWID is engaged with many women's rights networks exploring alternatives; what is being constructed in Latin America by feminists and others around the Andean concept of *Buen Vivir*; and lastly post-development visions for Africa (anticipating *Development* 55.4).

The Local/Global Encounters section reports on how feminists are resisting inequitable economic processes on the ground. The articles underline women's rights defenders' economic and social struggles in the regional and national context. Whether on the streets in the US Occupy movement, or in Arab squares, or protesting at shock therapy in Greece or indigenous women defending their territories – the authors speak of passion and courage, as well as pain. The concluding photo essay captures in images the breadth of emotions and sheer diversity of women (and men) attending the AWID Forum.

None of these themes and issues will be entirely new to *Development* readers who will recognize that this journal issue is a continuation of many of the journal's editorial concerns. Since 2008 (and earlier), *Development* has been assessing and questioning the crisis in economics, exploring concepts like food sovereignty, sustaining livelihoods, climate justice, cosmovisions, *Buen Vivir*, civic action and the green economy.

Even given that many contributors to those issues spoke of gender equality and women's rights, true to *Development's* editorial line, specific issues need to be devoted to deepening an understanding of gender power relations in

development. As very recent events show, women's rights and gender equality continues to be under threat. I am writing this as the results of the Egyptian election are coming in, with a win to Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood along with cheers of Islamists in Tahrir Square. I wonder what the young Egyptian women whom I listened to at the AWID Forum are feeling. The aftermath of the Arab Spring has not been inclusive of the women who came out on the streets 16 months ago.

I am also writing at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20 with its messy and disappointing end. Kumi Naidoo of Greenpeace has declared it a catastrophe. Certainly the women attending were appalled.² The official declaration called 'The Future We Want' signed by 190 countries only 'recalls' (not recognizes) the Beijing Declaration in 1995. And any reference to support sexuality, reproductive rights and health was repressed, at the instigation of the Vatican and conservative states. Such an outcome takes women's rights back two decades.

These losses for women's rights and body politics underline that it is vital that all of us understand that gender equality and women's rights are crucial to democracy and sustainable livelihoods, to the planet's health and to all of our future. It is too much to hope that the AWID Forum and this resulting set of excellent articles alone will keep the energy and passion we require to ensure a secure and safe future.

Feminists and women's rights defenders cannot do it for themselves, whatever the Annie Lennox and Aretha Franklin song (Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves) promises. What we need is for all people concerned about economic and social justice and development to be informed and knowledgeable on women's rights within the context of economic and the whole breadth of today's climate, food, energy and care crises. Women need to deal with economic issues from their own experience, in their own language and concerns and those experiences need to be brought to the table, as Ghosh says – feminists need to be actively engaged in the urgent task of finding alternatives.

The journal abounds with vision and understanding of what is required – the question will be how to ensure dialogue goes beyond the AWID Forum to reach others – so that gender equity is part of future social movement strategies, new forms of development policy and democratic change. The tweets, blogs and immediate reporting via ‘Open Democracy’, popular radio, television and alternative media meant that the highlights, individual peoples’ impressions and key messages went out immediately to tens of thousands of people. But building alliances is much harder.

So how to break out of the comfort zone of the AWID Forum? That does not mean that such Forums should not be (especially ones that are so well organized, are held in seven languages and

engage so many diverse people). These spaces are vital, given that the world is decidedly not a comfortable place for most attending – the transgender people, the sex workers, domestic workers, rape survivors, those living with disabilities, indigenous women, all of whom are struggling for their rights on many levels. But we need to work hard to make connections that reach out from such events and processes in order to build open inclusive spaces, networks and pathways towards economic justice. These alliances need to be built from strategic dialogues, joint action and political engagement that should be at the basis of true democratic engagement that confronts our current injustice economic and social power structures.

Notes

- 1 The AWID Forum held in Bangkok: ‘Women’s Rights in Development’, *Development* 49(1), (January 2006); The AWID Forum held in Cape Town: ‘Power, Movements, Change’, *Development* 52(2), (June 2009).
- 2 See the Women’s Major Group press release: <http://www.wecf.eu/english/press/releases/2012/06/womenstatement-outcomesRio.php>.

Introduction: Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women's Rights and Justice

CINDY CLARK AND
LYDIA ALPÍZAR
DURÁN

Between 19 and 22 April 2012, close to 2,240 women's rights activists and allies gathered in Istanbul under the banner of *Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women's Rights and Justice*. In organizing this 12th AWID International Forum on Women's Rights and Development, the intention was to explore how economic power is impacting women and the planet, and facilitate connections among diverse groups to contribute to stronger, more effective strategies to advance women's rights and justice.

In the three years leading up to the Forum, AWID worked with feminist economists and activists to research impacts of the financial crisis and economic recession on women, examine the implications for women of policy responses to the crisis and explore alternative visions of economy and their promise for advancing gender equality. The Forum was an important moment to gather and interrogate much of this analysis and to highlight key dilemmas or areas for further exploration and action in the years ahead.

As Dzodzi Tsikata aptly noted in the final plenary of the Forum, 'Debating development is a cyclical pastime. It's not lack of ideas and alternatives creating underdevelopment, it's the structure of power and decision-making which silences alternative thinking and approaches.'

The Forum itself and the process leading up to (and beyond) organizing it aimed both to surface contributions and insights from feminist economists and activists in key areas of economic analysis and policy (highlights of which are included in this journal), as well as strengthen our mobilization and collective power to transform those structures.

The current world reality challenges women's rights advocates to rethink our frameworks and strategies, renew and reactivate our commitment to movement building, to build up the constituencies that support our agendas, to speak not only to women's rights issues, but also to broader agendas for societal transformation in ways that are compelling to public opinion. In this spirit, the AWID Forum was also a call to revive feminist internationalism, to strengthen efforts of collective organizing across regions and global feminist movement building.

'Transforming Economic Power' seems a particularly important area of focus given the nature of this historical moment, with enormous changes that are laying bare the fragility (and inadequacy) of the current economic system and the shortcomings of the neo-liberal thinking at its core. The Forum theme aimed to squarely put economic power on the table, push feminists and women's rights movements to engage more head-on with these issues, and build strategies and alternatives for transformation. Even though some women's organizations and networks work on economic issues, the overall engagement of our movements in this area is inadequate. Often women's organizing is focused on survival, but remains isolated and with limited impact on broader macroeconomic questions until clear connections are drawn between core women's rights issues and the economy.

That is why the Forum included ten different sub-themes, to name and deepen analysis of the intersections between economic power and access to and control of resources, militarism conflict and violence, labour and work, sexuality, the role of the state, religion and culture, the planet and ecological health, global governance, financial flows, private sector and corporate power.

At the same time, the complexities and fast pace of change in the current context mean that making these connections and unravelling the economic dimensions shaping women's lives are hardly straightforward tasks. Geopolitical shifts, regionalization processes, perverse incentives that privilege the financial system at the expense of decent jobs and human well-being in times of crisis are just some of the factors that influence how economic policy decisions are being made.

Add to this some of the shifts that are explicitly threatening women's rights; for example, as described by Yakin Erturk, there is an increasing 'culturalization' of women's issues, which creates resistances to women's rights as alien to indigenous cultures, and fragments women's human rights movements. Culturalizing women's rights has delinked women's concerns from unequal gender structures, and from the wider political and economic environment. There are also alarming increases in violence against women human

rights defenders, not only in the number of cases, but also in the intensity of the violence being experienced by activists representing social dissent and mobilizing for change. The lack of capacity and resources to deal with this violence represents a clear threat against the sustainability of women's movements and also a clear call to prioritize and understand the political nature of safety, security and self-care, not only at the individual but also at the organizational and movement level, building collective responses to the violence.

It is important to note that the Forum debates were taking place in a region undergoing profound shifts. Women from the Middle East and North Africa brought words of caution from their experiences with the 'Arab Spring' and the extent to which women have been invisibilized after the uprisings, largely excluded from transition processes and now, in many contexts in the region, witnessing the rollback of hard-won achievements for women's rights. Beyond the excitement at the 'possibilities for change' brought by the revolutions in the region, we must now come to grips with some of the realities: protracted conflicts and heightened repression in contexts such as Syria and Yemen, and growing Islamist influence throughout the region. This is important in terms of how we build solidarity with women in the MENA region, as well as the implications of this influence for the global women's rights agenda in spaces such as the UN.

As we enter the period of +20 celebrations – Rio, Cairo, Vienna, Copenhagen, Beijing – prospects for significant advances in the full human rights and sustainable development agenda seem bleak.

And what is that transformation?

The words of Gita Sen during the opening plenary of the Forum stayed with many participants: '[regarding the current economic system] ... are we talking about taking the beast without killing it? I don't think we can kill it, but we need to humanize it'.

Throughout the Forum discussions, there was a tenuous balancing of aspirations for a more just paradigm, a transformed system, while also

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fighting for short-term changes in the current order that could have real and immediate impacts. The macroeconomic framework has not radically altered in the years since the 2008 financial crisis, which many had hoped was the opening of an opportunity for deeper change. Models of economic development still rely predominantly on commodification and growth, positioning the private sector as a key actor and beneficiary, and our global system is fuelled to a great degree by profits derived from militarism, depletion of natural resources and violations of human rights.

What were some of the aspirations named? There was little interest in attempting to identify one single model or even in putting a new adjective in front of development ('sustainable development', 'human development', etc.). Instead, below is a small selection of some of the principles and dimensions that emerged during Forum debates as critical for a more just system of economic power:

- Consider a human rights approach as an ethical lens to judge economic policy; markets and commodification must be in service to human rights and the care and management of the planet; we must reintegrate basic needs and economic rights to human rights discourse.
- Recognition of social provisioning as critical to economic systems and visibility of the diversity of unpaid work on which the commodified economy relies.
- Implement an intercultural approach that evolves the synthesis of values, cultures and visions that are sustainable and desirable as a gift to future generations. Reconnect with and practice the values that underpin non-market-based economies – reciprocity, collectivity, solidarity, harmony with nature.
- Apply an ecosystem lens – look beyond the dichotomy of individual and collective, beyond a focus on just forest, ocean or air, to consider the whole system and apply this lens to our communities.
- Go beyond existing indicators (like GDP) to claim our own indicators of well-being and sustainability that are responsive to our communities, rooted in the socio-economic condition

of each nation. This would require broad and deep discussions across cross-sections of people to unearth the principles and priorities that would guide these indicators.

- We need better tracking and information about the informal economy: not just the romanticized small-scale vendors, but gem, arms, drug trafficking that is responsible for significant volumes of financial flows. These flows have an enormous impact on the broader system.

Bridging diversities and stronger coalition-building was a refrain heard throughout the Forum. This is hardly a new idea, and yet clearly deep alliance-building is a work in progress that remains an urgent task. Some key dimensions of 'bridge-building' stood out as priorities named during the Forum:

- Connections between feminist scholars, economists and activists are key for dialogue across the alternatives taking shape in all those spheres – in the streets and within academia. Such connections are vital to tap the body of work that already exists of solid critical feminist economic analysis, and to bridge gaps between abstract concepts and practical tools, for example, for applying human rights standards to local economic concerns.
- Boaventura de Sousa Santos called for more 'articulation of movements' given that 'no matter how strong a social movement is, it cannot carry out its agenda in isolation'. This call was very much at the heart of the Forum and was why we sought to convene indigenous women, climate justice activists, women working within labour rights movements, economic justice activists, peasants, sex workers, women with disabilities, young women and others, so that from all these diversities participants could identify shared elements of their concerns and agendas as a foundation from which to build stronger understanding and potentially collaboration.
- Weaving insights from the various 'sites of struggle' in efforts to transform economic power – from trade unions to the UN, from local communities to parliaments, from financial markets to our homes.

- In the words of Radhika Balakrishnan, 'globalization requires globalization of resistance'. She called for movement beyond North/South and national divides, for careful work in local contexts but also connecting up regionally and globally. Careful attention to these linkages is vital for transforming economic power.

Building these kinds of bridges requires overcoming the fragmentation and overspecialization that in many cases has weakened or divided feminists and social justice actors. It also requires making visible and acting against the webs of complicity that facilitate the current system; whether it be passive taxpayers financing military interventions around the world, silence in the face of calls for support for economic rights struggles, such as those of sex workers; hypocrisy in the face of labour rights and demands of domestic workers; heightened repression of women human rights defenders.

Beyond the specifics of the learning, experience sharing and passionate debates at the Forum, it is clear that we need to rebuild the strength and power of women's movements at the global level. We need strong movements not just to more

effectively confront the serious threats against women's rights and gender equality present in the current context, but also to be proactive and dream big again. The coming three years, with reviews of many key international conferences and frameworks, offer a tremendous opportunity around which to do this rebuilding. It is therefore urgent to overcome differences and build strength from our diverse expressions of organizing, struggles, wisdom and capacity. The task ahead is huge and as history has shown, women need each other and our allies working together in strategic and generous ways, complementing each other's work and drawing power and inspiration from each other's struggles. It is AWID's hope that the 2012 Forum contributed to reenergize and inspire participants to give priority to this process of collective power building across women's movements and struggles at the global level.

Those interested in transforming economic power must be willing to get out of their comfort zones, to learn from others, to build solidarity and to revive that old feminist principle: we are not free, until all women are free, until all people are free.

Taxing for Gendered Economic Justice

DIANE ELSON AND
CORINA RODRÍGUEZ
ENRÍQUEZ

ABSTRACT *Diane Elson and Corina Rodríguez Enríquez argue that the aim to build strong, efficient and more equitable tax system should become a goal for feminism. They propose a framework for analysing taxation using a gender equality lens that could shape a fair and equitable taxation system.*

KEYWORDS *equity; feminist economics; fiscal system; parity; gender bias; goods; consumption*

Introduction

The generation of fiscal revenues is essential for governments to be able to undertake policies that foster economic and social development. The availability of resources shapes the level and quality of public services. The tax structure defines who bears the burden of funding them therefore many equity issues are involved. Over the last decades, feminist economists have analysed the social content of macroeconomic policies in general, and fiscal policies in particular.¹ They highlight how fiscal policies can mitigate or reinforce gender inequalities and asymmetrical gender relations.

Gender and fiscal policy

Fiscal policies produce different impacts on women and men's lives, as well as on the power relationships established among them. Fiscal policy, as any other economic policy, is gender biased. For example, if a government faces strict debt commitments, it cuts back budget on health, education and basic social infrastructure and services. This implies a shift of care activities to households, which, given the sexual division of labour, will impose an additional burden on women's time use. Or in a more positive scenario, if a government decides to improve the budget on education, in order to expand school attendance, this will probably benefit girls by closing the gap to access to education between boys and girls and therefore women's labour opportunities in the long run.

Gender budgets initiatives have revealed the gender implication of fiscal policies on the expenditure side. Gender analysis of taxation is, however, less developed. In the following, we present how to understand taxation from a gender equality perspective.

Taxation and gender equity

The key objective of tax policy is to provide enough revenue to fund government expenditures. However, this goal has historically had to be reached with equity while not compromising efficiency and ease of tax administration. In practice, the tax system of each country derives from a complex process shaped by a number of interests and factors (Valodia, 2010) due to the specific history, legal tradition, political structure and economic base of the country (Bahl and Bird, 2008).

Tax system designs consider how to ensure reasonable tax/GDP ratios, while minimizing tax avoidance, and arriving at socially accepted standards of tax equity. The idea is that taxpayers who are equally situated in economic terms should be treated equally for tax purposes. It follows that taxpayers who are not identical from an economic standpoint should be treated differently for tax purposes. Those in a better economic position should face a heavier tax burden, according to their ability to pay, given a criteria of progressivity attributed to tax structure in equity terms.

From a feminist perspective, tax equity should be revised, in order to guarantee substantive rather than formal equity. As Elson (2006) argues in her analysis of fiscal issues from the gender and human rights standpoint, we need to treat differently households that are similar in economic terms, for gender parity reasons. She argues the case for Personal Income Tax (PIT). In this case, 'what is at stake is not equality in terms of incidence of PIT on household income but equality in terms of implications of PIT for the set of gender relations. Many gender equality advocates would argue that the PIT *should not* result in a lower tax burden for families with breadwinner husbands and financially dependent housewives who do not engage in paid employment but *should* result in a lower tax burden for families in which both husbands and wives undertake unpaid domestic and are in paid employment. The ground for doing this are that dual-earner–dual-carer families constitute a more equal gender regime than male breadwinner – female carer families'. (Elson,

The idea of horizontal equity in tax systems should also be reviewed from a gender perspective, connected with the discussion of the proper unit of taxation. The case of PIT again provides a good example. When joint filing is the rule, the system considers tax liability on the combined income of both partners and the couple is the filing unit. In these cases, those who provide the second income (mostly women) might end up contributing at a higher tax rate than they would in an individual filing base. This is because their income is lower, and they would fall in a lower tax bracket if contributing just on their sole income. De Villota (2003) exposes how joint filing in PIT might cause disincentive to female labour market participation. This is truer, the lower the level of female labour income, which is to say, the higher the opportunity cost of that labour participation.

Along the same lines, Himmelweit (2002: 16) states that individual filing or separate taxation 'can be seen as a step towards gender equality in employment, since it favours a household with the same income. Separate taxation also improves women's bargaining power within their households; as women usually earn less than their husbands, wives will generally gain from being taxed at an individual, rather than a joint, rate'.

In this regard, there is also a considerable discussion about whether the outcome of unpaid care and domestic work should be considered as imputed income for tax purposes. The idea behind is that domestic work creates in-kind income, which should be quantified and included in total household income. Then, it might be considered appropriate for one-earner couples with a breadwinner and stay-at-home spouse to pay somewhat more tax on their market income in order to offset the substantial tax-free economic benefit generated by the unpaid work.

While, as Nelson (1996) states, this might be reasonable to treat in a more fair way dual earner households, as compared with male-breadwinner ones, this is still controversial. Grown (2010) highlights that some are concerned that if that was the case, the tax burden of low-income household would increase more than the tax burden of high-income households. In the same line, Elson (2006) argues that taxes should be paid in money,

and cannot be paid through unpaid domestic work. She suggests that the value of unpaid domestic work should be addressed in other ways (e.g., through the provision of tax allowances in order to offset the costs of buying substitutes for the unpaid domestic work).

Finally, an analysis of the tax systems with a gender equity lens should make visible gender bias. This is a notion provided by Stotsky (1997). She distinguishes between explicit and implicit gender bias.² Explicit forms of gender bias refer to specific regulations or provisions in tax law that treat men and women differently. This is a rather common feature of PIT arrangements, rather than in other forms of taxation. It might happen, for example, if jointly generated income is attributed by law, to a sole member of the couple (generally the man).

Implicit forms of gender bias, relate to provisions in tax systems that, because of systematically gendered social and economic customs and arrangements, have different impacts on men and women. These may be found, again, in PIT systems if they have joint filling requirements that tax secondary-earner income (primarily women's) at a higher marginal tax rate than primary-earner income, thus affecting women's labour supply and other decisions. Implicit bias may also be found in consumption taxes as a result of gender differences in spending behaviour. For example, Stotsky (1997) argues that high rates of excise tax (as compared with the standard VAT) on alcohol and tobacco are implicitly biased against men, who disproportionately consume these goods, and lower rates of VAT (than the standard rate) on medical care are implicitly biased against men, who consume less of these goods than women do. While the persistence of these patterns of consumption by gender are still to be proved, the example makes it clear how implicit biases could appear also in indirect taxation.

Many tax economists consider it justifiable to tax merit goods and basic necessities at a lower rate than demerit goods and luxuries (Grown, 2010). The identification of 'merit goods' in terms of gender (e.g., care services), that might want to be benefited by taxation, could be taken into account.

Some empirical evidence

Grown and Valodia (2010) is the most updated and comprehensive internationally comparative review of gender aspects of tax systems. They present the results of a comparative study that analysed the cases of Argentina, India, Mexico, Ghana, Morocco, South Africa, Uganda and the United Kingdom. The study included two components. First, they reviewed the existence of gender bias in PIT codes. Second, they studied indirect taxation incidence on different gendered households types.³ The research findings reveal some of the assumptions regarding gender implications of taxation.

'The country studies have all uncovered implicit biases in the PIT systems in their countries. These are mainly the result of the nature and structure of exemptions and deductions provided by the particular tax regime, and the manner in which these relate to the distribution of employment and income. In many of the countries, for example, contributions to pension funds attract generous tax benefits. Since men tend to be employed disproportionately in the formal sector and earn higher incomes, men disproportionately benefit from these allowances' (Valodia, 2010: 305). 'In Argentina, Ghana and Morocco, the availability of a deduction for a dependent spouse causes single-parent households to bear a larger burden than male-breadwinner households with financially dependent spouses' (Grown, 2010: 10). Therefore, exemptions and deduction in PIT reinforce gender inequality derived from the labour market, as well as from other income sources. They revealed as implicit gender bias in direct taxation.

Similar results were found by Pazos Morán and Rodríguez (2010). In their study of PIT in three Latin American countries and Spain, they found the same implicit bias caused by the treatment of exemptions, deductions and allowances. In the same line, De Villota (2003) brings another example of implicit gender bias in PIT, in her study of taxation in Europe. The case in Spain is clear enough, and proves the negative gender consequence of joint filling, which on one side penalize women who are often the second income at home, and on the other side, might disincentive fe-

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male labour participation.

Explicit bias in PIT has also been proved in some of the country cases studied by Grown and Valodia (2010). For example, in Morocco, the system allocates dependant allowances automatically to the male taxpayer, but on the contrary requires women to prove that they have dependants, in order to receive the benefit. In India, there are different exemption limits, which are higher for women. In Argentina, all non-labour income from a jointly owned business or financial investment is allocated to the husband to report on his tax form; while this may result in a lower tax burden on women, this provision in the tax code constitutes discrimination.

The findings on gender considerations of indirect taxes are less straightforward. In this sense, one of the most important research results is the need of further discussion on methodology issues as well as further research.

For the cases studied, in general, male-breadwinner households⁴ bear the highest incidence of indirect taxes, 'with much of this being driven by these households' greater consumption of goods that attract excise taxes and fuel taxes. Using the employment-based definition for households, three country studies show that male-breadwinner households bear the heaviest incidence of total indirect taxes in Argentina, Ghana, Mexico, South Africa and Uganda, largely owing to these households' greater consumption of good that attract excises taxes. They also bear the heaviest incidence of fuel levies in Ghana, Uganda and Morocco' (Valodia, 2010: 308).⁵

These encouraging results might be explained by the fact that the majority of the case studies make extensive use of zero-rating and exemptions in VAT to protect households in lower income brackets (where female-type households are majority). Moreover, some simulations conducted as part of the research proved that without zero-rating, the incidence of VAT would have been higher for female-type households and the existing gaps would be enlarged.

Finally, the results of the analysis of excise and fuel taxes arrived at three main insights. First, there are tax incidence differences derived from different patterns of consumption between men and

women. Second, taxation can effectively be used to penalize some type of consumption, or otherwise, to reward consumption of merit goods. Third, fuel taxation is progressive in every country, on both income-equality and gender-equality grounds.

While up to now gender aware and feminist research in taxation is still embryonic, it provides important insights into existing gender bias and discrimination in tax codes and systems. It also provides valuable insights for incorporating the gender dimension into alternative proposal for tax reforms.

What should feminists advocate in the taxation domain?

Taking for granted that the agreement on that market distribution is unfair, and that a more equitable society is a valuable goal, from the 1990s onward, it was assumed that the expenditure side of fiscal policy was the key tool for governments to carry out redistribution. Mainstream economists considered this was necessary in order to preserve goals of efficiency and ease of administration in taxation. This was particularly so in developing countries, where it was assumed there was a weak state capacity, as well as poor tax behaviour from many different types of taxpayers.

The persistence of huge inequalities around the world requires that we need to bring back equity as a prominent feature of needed tax reforms. In brief, feminists should first assume the 'social cause' of tax reforms, and then shape them from a gender equity perspective.

For this, we need further evaluation from a gender perspective of current tax systems. Following Himmelweit (2002) and Valodia (2010), we need to highlight the following as the principles of any transformative and gender-aware tax policy evaluation:

- (i) the distributional impacts of tax policies should be assessed not only in regards with income groups, or any other form of social stratification, but also in terms of women and men (and girls and boys);

- (ii) policymakers should consider the impact of taxation policies and tax reforms on both paid and unpaid work, and the interdependence between these two spheres of the economy;
- (iii) impacts should be considered not only among households but also within households; this means to clarify the impact of tax policies and tax reforms on different gendered households types (such as, single earner versus double earner, female headed versus male headed, single parent, multiple-generation households, same-sex partnership households etc) as well as on different members within households, to identify the degree to which gender inequalities within the household are mitigated or reinforced by taxation policies;
- (iv) consideration should be taken about how tax policies affect people differently over their life cycle.

Given the assumption that gender-aware research on tax issues will prove the existence of gender bias and discrimination, as well as the fact that many tax structures are proving obstacles in the goal of improving gender equality, contributing to deepening gender inequality, alternative tax reforms should be proposed.

From a feminist perspective taxation should include the following goals:

- (i) increase revenues (specially in those countries where tax/GDP ratios are still low);
- (ii) more progressive tax structure;
- (iii) avoid explicit discrimination against women, and against any other oppressed group in society;
- (iv) favour 'paritarian' household types⁶;
- (v) induce behavioural changes in order to transform existing gender inequalities;
- (vi) foster citizens participation in tax policy design and monitoring.

Conclusion

A progressive tax system should both prioritize direct taxation, as well as maximize alternative

methods that might make indirect taxation more progressive. In the first case, it is important that many countries improve their PIT systems. In many developing countries, PIT revenue accounts for a small share of the total, and therefore should be extended. In so doing, it would be important to take into account the elements already mentioned: that individual filing is better in gender terms; that exemptions, deductions and allowances should be used careful in order not to produce gender bias; and that explicit gender bias in tax codes should clearly be avoided.

The use of zero or reduced rate in VAT has proved to be effective as a tool for progressive indirect taxation, when applied to basic goods. These types of measures result in substantial gender equity and poverty reduction outcomes. Specific treatment in indirect taxation could promote the consumption of merit goods (e.g., food or basic education), as well as penalize the consumption of demerit goods (as might the case of luxury items in very unequal countries).

All of these general suggestions should be studied carefully in practical cases, since externalities of each of these measures might vary from country to country. The goal should always be to reduce those elements that are obstacles to advance gender equality, as well as to consolidate those that might help transforming the roots of gender discrimination.

At the same time, the expenditure side of fiscal policy should not be forgotten. In fact, integrated analysis of expenditure and taxes are needed in order to understand how the situation of people and households might improve (or not) with State intervention.

A feminist proposal for taxation with equity should be linked to other alternative proposals on taxation such as the idea of a global taxation on financial transactions. Advocacy for more fiscal accountability, as well as more and better citizenship participation in fiscal matters, are key to building more inclusive and democratic policymaking.

Notes

- 1 For a key article on the social content of macroeconomics policies, see Elson and Cagatay (2000).
- 2 Elson (2006) does not feel comfortable with the use of 'bias'. She considers it is a normative and pejorative term, implying and unjustified asymmetry that stems from treating men and women differently. By contrast, a non-biased system would treat the same. This would not be a sound conclusion in gender terms. She, on the contrary, argues that a gender analysis of taxation must go beyond the principle of sameness to recognize that discrimination and bias take different forms, and that, in order to achieve substantive equality, different groups in society may require different treatment, and this should not be considered biased treatment (Grown, 2010).
- 3 They studied the case of VAT, excise taxes and fuel taxes.
- 4 Households type were defined with three criteria: (i) sex of household head (male headed households and female headed households); (ii) employment status of adults (male-breadwinner households, female-breadwinner households, dual-earner households, non-employed households); (iii) number of adults by sex (male-majority households, female-majority households and equal-number households).
- 5 It should be noticed, as Valodia (2010: 308) explains, that 'these results may be sensitive to the fact that the incidence analysis is conducted on expenditure. In Mexico, . . . , the incidence analysis on income suggested some different trends. In particular, Mexican households in which most income is earned by women have a higher indirect tax incidence than households where men earn most income. Incidence is lowest in households where men and women earn similar incomes'.
- 6 Paritarian households would be those where there is parity in male and female members participation in paid and unpaid work, as well as fair access and control over economic resources.

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Who's Who

Angelika Arutyunova is a Manager, Where is the Money for Women's Rights? She is Armenian who was born and raised in Uzbekistan. Before joining AWID, she worked for the Global Fund for Women. Her latest position in the Global Fund was Program Director for Europe and CIS grantmaking portfolio. She has advisory status with several donor agencies in ECIS region and was on the Steering Committee of the Grantmakers East Forum, the Affinity group of European Foundation Center.

Contact details:
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
1587 Stillwell Rd Apt H
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94129, USA
Tel: +1 415 308 9346
Email: aarutyunova@awid.org
Website: www.awid.org

Radhika Balakrishnan, Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, and Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University, has a Ph.D. in Economics from Rutgers University. Previously, she was a Professor of Economics and International Studies at Marymount Manhattan College. She has worked at the Ford Foundation as a programme officer in the Asia Regional Program. She is currently the Chair of the Board of

the US Human Rights Network and on the Board of the Center for Constitutional Rights and the International Association for Feminist Economics. She is the co-editor with Diane Elson of *Economic Policy and Human Rights: Holding Governments to Account* (Zed Books, 2011). She is the author of *Why MES with Human Rights: Integrating Macro Economic Strategies with Human Rights* (Marymount Manhattan College, 2005). She edited *The Hidden Assembly Line: Gender Dynamics of Sub-contracted Work in a Global Economy* (Kumarian Press, 2001), co-edited *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*, with Patricia Jung and Mary Hunt (Rutgers University Press, 2000), and also authored numerous articles that have appeared in books and journals. Professor Balakrishnan's work focuses on gender and development, gender and the global economy, human rights and economic and social rights. Her research and advocacy work has sought to change the lens through which macroeconomic policy is interpreted and critiqued by applying international human rights norms to assess macroeconomic policy.

Contact details:
Executive Director, Center for Women's Global Leadership

Professor, Women's and Gender Studies Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
160 Ryders Lane New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8555, USA
Tel: +1 732 932 8782
Fax: +1 732 932 1180
Email: cwgl@rci.rutgers.edu
Website: <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu>

Asoka Bandarage, Yale, PhD, is Author of *Colonialism in Sri Lanka* (Mouton, 1983), *Women, Population and Global Crisis* (Zed, 1997), *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Routledge, 2009) and many other publications on international development, gender studies, conflict analysis and so on. She has taught at Yale, Brandeis, Mount Holyoke, Georgetown and other academic institutions in the US and abroad, Serves on Boards of National Advisory Council on South Asia, Critical Asian Studies, Population, Reproduction and Ethics and has worked as a consultant in the areas of international development, gender and conflict resolution.

Contact details:
Email: asokabandarage@gmail.com
Website: www.bandarage.com

Elissa Braunstein is an Associate Professor at the Department of Economics, Colorado State University, USA

Contact details:

Associate Professor
C327 Clark, Department of
Economics, Colorado State
University
Campus 1771, Fort Collins,
CO 80523-1771, USA
Tel: +1 970 491 5249
Fax: +1 970 491 2925
Email: elissa.braunstein@
colostate.edu

Tzinnia Carranza is a Biologist, holds a Master's degree in Development and Environmental Studies. Tzinnia is a Founder and the Technical Director of Indígena-EECO, A.C. work with indigenous peoples focuses on gender and the environment, specifically around natural resources management, solidarity economy, climate change and community planning. She specializes in the use of participative and pedagogical methodologies. She has played a key role on building local, national and regional networks and has authored various publications with a gender focus.

Contact details:

Río Escondido 122, San Felipe del Agua, C.P. 68020, Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, MÉXICO
Tel: +52 1 951 5006419; +52 1 951 5200993
Emails: tzinniacarranza@hotmail.com and tianguis.indigena@gmail.com

Cindy Clark is a Director of Programs with the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), an international feminist membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable

development and women's human rights. Cindy is responsible for providing strategic support and oversight with managers of AWID's strategic initiatives and played an active role in the programmatic development of the 2012 AWID Forum on *Transforming Economic Power to Advance Women's Rights and Justice*. She was a Lead Researcher on AWID's *Where is the Money for Women's Rights* (WITM) initiative from its inception and was previously the Manager of the WITM and *Building Feminist Movements and Organizations*. Before joining AWID in 2007, she was a founding member of JASS (Just Associates). She has an MA in Human and Organizational Development, specializing in the study of change and learning processes in organizations.

Contact details:

Email: @awid.org

Lydia Alpizar Durán is Costa Rican feminist activist who lives in Sao Paulo. She has been the Executive Director of Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) 2007, and was the manager of the *Where is the Money for Women's Rights? Building Feminist Movements and Organizations* Initiatives of AWID from 2003 to 2006. Lydia is co-founder and advisor of ELIGE – Youth Network for Reproductive and Sexual Rights (Mexico), and she is also co-founder of the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Network for Reproductive and Sexual Rights. She is on the Board of Directors for the Global Fund for Women and of the Central American Women's Fund. She

is also a graduate from the Human Rights Advocacy Training Program at the Center for the Study of Human Rights in Columbia University in NYC.

Contact details:

Email: lalpizar@awid.org

Diane Elson is a pioneer feminist economist and well-known author. Among her many associations she is member of the *Development* journal editorial board. She recently retired as Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex.

Contact details:

Department of Sociology
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester CO4 3SQ, UK
Tel: +44 01206 873539
Email: drelson@essex.ac.uk

Yakin Ertürk serves on the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). She was the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, from 2003 to 2009, and until recently Professor of Sociology at Middle East Technical University, Ankara, TURKEY.

Contact details:

Tel: +90 312 442 5147
Email: erturk@metu.edu.tr

Team members:

Alejandra Scampini – Manager
Natalie Raaber – Research Coordinator
Ana Abelenda – Program Associate

Alma Espino is an Economist, is currently at the Institute of Economics, Faculty of Economics Sciences and Administration,

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University of the Republic, Uruguay. Her main research fields are gender and labor market. Other areas of expertise include feminist economics, development economics and regional economics. Since 2011, she is teacher of 'Gender and Economics' at the Faculty. Since 1999, she is the Department Coordinator on Development and Gender at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Development Studies, Uruguay (CIEDUR) and since 2006 she is Co-founder and part of the 'Gender and Macroeconomics Group of Latin American and Caribbean (GEM-LAC)'. Among works Espino is Co-author of 'La economía feminista desde América Latina Una hoja de ruta sobre los debates actuales en la región' (book) Valeria Esquivel (Ed.) Onumujeres. 2012. Dominican Republic. She has been consultant for ECLAC, ILO, UNRISD, Heinrich Boell Foundation, UNDP, World Bank, UNIFEM, Women's Economic Agenda – Central America, Women in Development Europe; AWID, IADB.

Contact details:

CIEDUR

18 de Julio 1645/7

Montevideo – URUGUAY

CP: 11200

Email: almaespino**ci**edur@gmail.com

Jayati Ghosh is a Professor of Economics at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is Executive Secretary of International Development Economics Associates (IDEAS), an international network of

development economists (www.networkideas.org). She has authored several books and more than one hundred scholarly articles. She was also the principal author of the West Bengal Human Development Report 2004, which received the 2005 UNDP Award for excellence in analysis. She has received the NordSud Prize for Social Sciences 2010 of the Fondazione Pescarabruzzo, Italy, and has been awarded the ILO Decent Work Research Prize for 2010. She is a regular columnist for several newspapers and journals. She was the Chairperson of the Commission on Farmers Welfare in 2004 constituted by the state government of Andhra Pradesh in India, and Member of the National Knowledge Commission reporting to the Prime Minister of India (2005–2009). She has consulted for a large number of international organisations, including UNDP, UNCTAD, UN-DESA and ILO. She is closely involved in working with progressive organisations and social movements.

Contact details:

Centre for Economic Studies and Planning

School of Social Sciences

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi 110067, INDIA

Tel: +9111 26704421

Email: jayati**jnu**@gmail.com

Ipek Ilkcaracan is an Associate Professor of Economics at Istanbul Technical University (ITU), Faculty of Management. Her research interests include the macroeconomics of unemployment and wages, female

labor market participation, the gender wage gap, and unpaid work and time-use. Her recent book on work-family reconciliation policies is the first-ever publication on this issue in Turkish. She is also among the founding members of a number of feminist initiatives such as Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways (WWHR), the Women's Labor and Employment Initiative (the KEIG Platform) and the Women's Studies Center in Science, Technology and Engineering at ITU.

Contact details:

Associate Professor of Economics
Istanbul Technical University
Faculty of Management

Maçka, İstanbul 34367, TURKEY

Contact details:

Tel: +90 212 2931300

Fax: +90 2122248685

Email: ilkcaracan@itu.edu.tr

Lissy Joseph is Founder and Coordinator of the National Domestic Workers Movement-AP Region. Sr Lissy is a lecturer at St Francis College and involved in the Campaign for Housing and Tenure Rights and the Trade Union of Domestic Workers at the National Level. She is from India, Kerala, but is living and working in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh for the last 30 years.

Contact details:

Emails: srlissy**j**@yahoo.com;

srlissyjoseph@rediffmail.com

Marjorie Mbilinyi is a life-time Scholar Activist and Active Founder Member of several feminist/gender-oriented organizations and networks in Tanzania and Africa, including the Tanzania

Gender Networking Programme (1993-), the Feminist Activist Coalition (1994-), and Gender and Economic Reforms in Africa, GERA, and also belongs to the African Feminist Forum. A retired Professor of Education from the University of Dar es Salaam, Marjorie Mbilinyi has extensive experience in participatory organizing, pedagogy and research at national and community level, linked to feminist advocacy and activism. She is currently working at TGNP in the Activism, Research and Analysis Department. In the last few years, most writings have been collective and popular, in both English and Kiswahili. Recent co-edited books include *Activist Voices*, *Against-Neoliberalism*, *Nyerere on Education Vol I*, and *Food is Politics*. Recent journal articles include 'Struggles Over Land Reform in Tanzania: Experiences of Tanzania Gender Networking Programme and Feminist Activist Coalition' co-authored with Gloria Shechambo in *Feminist Africa* 12: 2009; 'Reflecting with Nyerere on people-centred leadership' *Pambazuka News* 452 (2009) Special Issue *How We Wish You were Here: The Legacy of Mwalimu Nyerere* [2009-10-13] and 'Rooting Transformative Feminist Struggles in Tanzania at Grassroots' (and Demere Kitunga) *Review of African Political Economy* No 121: 435-442 [2009]. Recent book articles include 'Sweet and Sour: Women Working for Wages on Tanzania's Sugar Estates' in Deborah Fahy Bryceson (ed.) *How Africa Works: Occupational Change, Identity and Morality* (Practical Action Publishing, 2010) and

'Sophia Mustafa: Nation Builder and Emancipator of Women' in Sophia Mustafa *The Tanganyika Way* new edition (Toronto, Tsar Publications, 2009).

Contact details:

P O Box 35815
University of Dar es Salaam
Dar es Salaam, TANZANIA
Email: marjorie.mbilinyi@tgnp.org

Lisa A. McGowan is an Economist and Gender Expert with over 25 years of experience working to empower women and citizens more broadly to shape the development, labour and global economic policies that affect them. In over 12 years of work at the Solidarity Center, she has developed and implemented transformational education programs related to women workers' empowerment and action in the global economy, most recently in the Middle East. Before joining the Solidarity Center, she worked at the Development Group for Alternative Policies and the 50 Years Is Enough campaign to bring citizen voices to bear on the shaping of global economic policy to promote rights-based development. She has also worked as an Economist and Director of Technical Services at the International Center for Research on Women, and as a Foundation Representative to Haiti at the InterAmerican Foundation.

Contact details:

Senior Specialist for Gender Equality
Solidarity Center
888 16th Street NW Suite 400
WASHINGTON, DC 20006, USA

Tel: +1 202 974 8357

Fax: +1 202 974 8265

Email: lmcgowan@solidaritycenter.org

Kinda Mohamadih works for the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)/ www.annd.org, on economic and social rights, development policies, trade and investment agreements, and other globalization and governance issues. Kinda contributes to the coordinating committees of the Social Watch Network, Our World is not for Sale, and Global Call to Action against Poverty.

Contact details:

Arab NGO Network for Development

P.O. Box: 14/5792 Mazraa 1105 2070

Beirut, LEBANON

Tel: +961 1 319 366

Fax: +961 1 815 636

Email: kinda.mohamadih@annd.org

Website: www.annd.org

Bhumika Muchhala works for the Finance and Development Programme, Third World Network.

Contact details:

131 Macalister Road, Penang, MALAYSIA

Email: bhumika.muchhala@gmail.com

Website: www.twnet.org.sg

Sandra Ramos is Founder and Director of MEC – the 'Maria Elena Cuadra' Working and Unemployed Women's Movement of Nicaragua, a long-term Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) partner. MEC supports unemployed and indigenous women and those

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working in free trade zones in eight departments of Nicaragua. The organization was founded in 1994 and is an autonomous women's movement that aims for the inclusion and full participation of women in the Nicaraguan society. To achieve these goals MEC works from a gender perspective on the organization, education and training of women. MEC addresses a wide set of issues affecting women such as domestic violence as well as social, labour and economic rights. It also engages in advocacy initiatives to promote changes in public policy and legislation in order to improve the living standards of working and unemployed women.

Contact details:

Km. 35 carretera a Catarina,
Masaya, NICARAGUA

Tel: + 505 87012264

Email: ines20101988@hotmail.com

Elizabeth Reid is a Development Practitioner, Feminist Activist and Social Researcher. Her extensive development practice has a particular emphasis on gender, power and social justice, on approaches to community engagement, on the social dynamics of the HIV epidemic, on the building of local capacities for collective agency and inclusive citizenship, and on understanding development effectiveness.

Contact details:

PO Box 5104, Braddon, ACT 2612,
AUSTRALIA

Tel: +612 6262 6422

Fax: +612 6262 6567

Mobile: +61 410 346 124

Email: elizabeth.reid@runbox.com, lizzie.a.reid@gmail.com

Marilyn Waring is Professor of Public Policy at AUT University in Auckland New Zealand. She is a feminist political economist and environmental and human rights activist. She is the author of *Counting for Nothing/If Women Counted, Three Masquerades, In the Lifetime of a Goat, 1 Way 2 C the World*, and co author of *Who Cares – the Economics of Dignity*, about the 24/7 work of caregivers of those living with HIV and AIDs. *Email:* marilyn.waring@aut.ac.nz

Corina Rodriguez Enríquez is a Researcher at the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (Conicet) [National Council of Scientific and Technical Research] and at the Centro Interdisciplinario para el Estudio de Políticas Públicas (Ciepp) [Interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of Public Policy] in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Member of Gem-Lac (Grupo de Género y Macroeconomía de América Latina/Latin American Gender and Macroeconomic Group) and Board Member of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE). *Contact details:*

Rodriguez Peña 557 2do F
1020 Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA

Email: crodriguezzenriquez@ciepp.org.ar

Meena Shivdas is a Gender and Development Specialist at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. Her work focuses on women's rights, HIV, culture and the law, social justice and the politics of marginalisation.

Contact details:

Email: m.shivdas@commonwealth.int

Alejandra Scampini Manager of Strategic Initiative on Influencing Development Actors and Practices for Women's Rights at AWID. Alejandra is a passionate Uruguayan Feminist Activist. Before joining AWID she worked for 4 years at ActionAid as the Women's Rights coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean. Alejandra also worked with REPEM for more than 10 years where she gained vast experience in women's rights, education and development advocacy working closely with networks such as DAWN, ICAE, IGTN and others. An Educator by training, Alejandra is currently working on her Masters in Education at the Catholic University of Uruguay.

Contact details:

AWID Toronto office
215 Spadina Ave, Suite 150
Toronto, Ontario M5T 2C7,
CANADA

Tel: +1 416 594 3773

Fax: +1 416 594 0330

Email: ascampini@awid.org

Natalie Raaber is a Feminist and Human Rights Researcher, Policy Analyst and Activist. Presently, at the Association for Women's Right in Development (AWID), she, together with her colleagues, has worked to develop a research program focused on (1) feminist analyses of the 2008 financial and economic crisis and (2) alternative strategies, visions, and approaches to development and economic policy. In addition to her work with AWID, she supports a variety of social justice organizing locally, including around Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer

(LGBTQ) rights and the rights of migrants. She holds an MSc in Philosophy and Public Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science and currently lives in New York.

Contact details: AWID Toronto office

215 Spadina Ave, Suite 150
Toronto, Ontario M5T 2C7,
CANADA

Tel: +1 416 594 3773

Fax: +1 416 594 0330

Email: NRAaber@awid.org

Gita Sen is Professor of Public Policy at the Centre for Public Policy Indian Institute of Management, She is a leading feminist researcher and founder member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era.

Contact details:

Centre for Public Policy
Indian Institute of Management
Bannerghata Road
Bangalore 560076, INDIA

Tel: +91 80 2699 3076

Email: gita@iimb.ernet.in

Website: www.iimb.ernet.in/user/120/sita-sen

Marwa Sharafeldin is a women's rights Activist based in Cairo, completing her doctorate in Law at the University of Oxford. She is a campaigner for the reform of personal status laws in Egypt. She is Co-founder of the Network for Women's Rights Organisations and of the Young Arab Feminist Network, as well as NGOs such as Fat'het Kheir and Nahdet el-Mahrousa in Egypt. She is also Member of the International Advisory Group leading Musawah, the International Movement for

Muslim Family Law Reform. She was a protester and campaigner in January 2011, as well as in demonstrations since, most notably the successive Women's Marches of 2011 and 2012. She is also involved in the 'Let Us Write Our Constitution' and 'Women in the Constitution' civil society initiatives. Marwa believes in removing the boundaries between the political, the social, the artistic and the radical. She is a Story Collector, a Writer and Performer in the Ana Masry, which sings for national unity and equality for all Egyptians.

Contact details:

Email: msharafeldin@google mail.com

María Suárez Toro is a feminist, journalist and human rights activist in local, national, regional and international arenas through her work as co-director of FIRE: Feminist International Radio Endeavour between 1991 and the present. She also worked as a human rights activist and literacy teacher at the grassroots level in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras.

Contact details:

Email: maria2003@racsa.co.cr

Website: www.wimnonline.org/WLMNSVoicesBlog/?author=49&profile

Nidhi Tandon is a Social Activist, Animator and Writer working with women and with marginalized communities to raise their voices in a digitized world. She founded and runs a network of independent consultants www.networkedintelligence.com. Her more recent work re-

volves around the relationships between women and water, energy, natural resources, food security and related policy decisions in the context of climate change. She has witnessed the impacts of the bio-fuel industry on food security and women's farming livelihoods, land grab on rural women in Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia and climate change on women farmers in countries like Tajikistan, Antigua and Haiti. With a news journalist background with ZIANA (Zimbabwe International News Agency) and the BBC Africa service, She has over 25 years experience in research, training and workshop facilitation. In her volunteer life, she is currently Board Director with Oxfam Canada, Council Member with the Canadian Ombudsman for Banking Services and Investments (OBSI) and President of Ontario Nature – a province-wide advocacy group for environmental conservation.

Contact details:

Networked Intelligence for Development

461 Roncesvalles Avenue, Suite D, Corner House

Toronto, ON M6R 2N4, CANADA

Tel: + 416 538 7398

Email: nidhi@networkedintelligence.com

Dzodzi Tsikata is an Associate Professor, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) and Director, Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA), University of Ghana. Member of the steering committee of the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana.

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Contact details:

Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER)
Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA)
University of Ghana, Legon, GHANA
Tel: +233 21 501182
Fax: +233 21 512504
Email: dtsikata@ug.edu.gh;
dzodzit@yahoo.co.uk

Yvonne Underhill-Sem Director of the Centre for Development Studies University of Auckland and Associate Editor of *Development*. Yvonne is of Cook Islands and New Zealand heritage and has taught at universities in Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Australia and she has also been an independent scholar in Samoa and Germany and worked with the Secretariat of the Africa, Caribbean, Pacific Group of States (ACP) in Brussels. She currently teaches gender and development, critical population studies and Pacific geography and is completing her first monograph for Zed Books series on Gender and Environment.

Contact details:

Centre for Development Studies
Human Sciences Building 10
Symonds St. University of Auckland, NEWZEALAND
Email: y.underhill-sem@auckland.ac.nz
Website: www.artsfaculty.auckland.ac.nz/staff/?UPI=yund001

Lisa Vene Klasesn, Activist, Political Educator and Writer, has worked with social movements, grassroots organizers and international development NGOs in many parts of the world. She is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Just Associates (JASS), an international feminist organization working to strengthen women's activism and movements on a range of gender justice and rights agendas in Mesoamerica, Southern Africa, Southeast Asia and internationally.

Contact details:

2040 S St., NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20009, USA
Tel: +1 202 232 1211
Email: lvk@justassociates.org

Christa Wichterich is a Sociologist and Scholar Activist. She

works as a freelance Writer, Guest Lecturer at universities and Consultant for development agencies. Her main areas of work are feminist economics and feminist ecology, globalisation and its crises, women's and social movements. Her feminist home is since many years WIDE (Women in Development Europe).

Contact details:

Schlossstr.2
53115 Bonn, GERMANY
Tel: +49 228 265032
Email: Christawic@aol.com

Lois Woestman is a Lecturer in Anthropology of Contemporary Greek Society at Arcadia University (Athens branch), an External Funding Officer at the Agricultural University of Athens and an independent research/policy advice consultant (including for UNWOMEN, Europe-based WIDE + Network, global Association for Women in Development – AWID)

Contact details:

Giannitson 4, Holargos, Athens 15562, GREECE
Email: loiswoestman@hotmail.com

Last Word



What's on the SID Forum

Conversation on body, gender and empowerment with Chloe Schwenke, Alexandru Balasescu, Hulda Ouma and Wendy Harcourt.

<http://www.sidint.net/node/6699>

Discusses the linkages between pop culture, activism and gender empowerment from the perspective of different local cultures.



Women making change happen! Interview with Alejandra Scampini

<http://www.sidint.net/node/7455>

Explains how the feminist agenda has changed over the years through new connections with different development movements and diverse fields of activism.

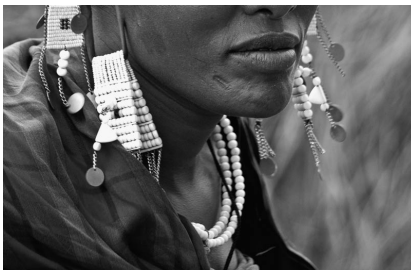


Models priorities pressures of women today in Africa.

Interview with Marjorie Mbilinyi

<http://www.sidint.net/node/4722>

Explores what it means to be a woman in Africa today and what issues feminist movements are reclaiming in Africa.



Women and MDGs in South Eastern Europe by Klelija Balta

<http://www.sidint.net/node/5981><http://www.sidint.net/node/>

Highlights how though gender parity is legally recognized and regulated, South Eastern European women are still unable to exercise fully their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Key challenges for the MDGs process with respect to women's rights and gender justice by Ana Agostino

<http://www.sidint.net/node/5914>

Points out that despite the increase of women's participation in several professions, the empowerment gap remains high as women continue to be under-represented in decision-making.

(En)-gendering Somalia by Shukria Dini

<http://www.sidint.net/node/3984>

Argues that the armed struggle led by various warlords is a 'gender war', as militarized violence has wreaked havoc on men and women's lives for two decades.

Why women's empowerment programs are still needed in the Palestinian Territories by Carla Pagano

<http://www.sidint.net/node/4783>

Explains how control of territory and isolation of local areas is weakening women's capacity to become politically engaged.

Kenya vision from an income and gender inequalities perspective by Hulda Ouma

<http://www.sidint.net/node/5239>

Suggests that Kenya's Vision 2030 does not address existing income and gender inequalities.

Gender and empowerment. A conversation with Nejra Cengic

<http://www.sidint.net/node/4827>

Responds to Wendy Harcourt's editorial 'Lady Gaga meets Ban Ki-Moon' in *Development* vol. 53 no 2.

The missing link: Migrant domestic workers in Europe by Wendy Harcourt

<http://www.sidint.net/content/taking-citizenship-rights-you-new-vision-human-mobility-i?q=node/4886>

Describes the debate on migration at the WIDE 2010 Annual Conference

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