



# ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES FOR GENDER AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

## VOICES AND VISIONS FROM LATIN AMERICA



This is the second publication in the series **Economic Alternatives for Gender Equality and Social Justice** produced by WIDE.

**Economic Alternatives for Gender and Social Justice: Voices and Visions from Latin America** reflects WIDE's strategic goal to promote the construction of alternatives to the current dominant economic model from a feminist perspective. This publication is the result of a longstanding collaboration between WIDE and her allies in Latin America.

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*Style and language of different authors has been respected in the editing process.*

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ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES  
FOR GENDER AND SOCIAL JUSTICE:

**VOICES AND VISIONS  
FROM LATIN AMERICA**

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## FOREWORD

Since 1985, WIDE's work to promote economic alternatives for gender equality and social justice has formed an integral part of its agenda. Our commitment to challenge the still prevailing growth-based economic model, which is driven by a profit-oriented ideology has grown even stronger since the outbreak of the systemic crisis.

WIDE believes that the interlocking crises affecting our planet reveal more than ever the failure of the current model; in particular, its failure to ensure the enforcement of women's and men's right to basic needs, food security, social equality and gender justice, as well as environmental sustainability.

Current inadequate political responses to the crisis have increased the urgency to continue to bring to the fore existing alternatives and policy proposals with a view to transform mainstream economic policies from a redistributive approach. It is in this context that WIDE has joined other social movements and feminist and civil society organisations. We want to jointly reflect upon and disseminate alternatives that are currently being constructed at the local, national, regional and global level.

*“Economic Alternatives for Gender Equality and Social Justice: Voices and Visions from Latin America” is the result of a long standing collaboration between WIDE and its allies in Latin America and represents the second volume of WIDE’s series on alternatives. The first volume focuses on India and is titled “In search of Economic Alternatives for Gender and Social Justice: Voices from India.”\**

This collaboration aims at fostering further debates on strategies as to how existing alternatives and proposals can be turned into public policies that promote and reinforce a climate of gender and social justice globally. The present publication systematises and shares the knowledge on alternative economic experiences where the economy and trade relations are placed at the service of people's and nature's well-being. In WIDE's vision, this is the cornerstone of a women's rights perspective.

In particular, it aims to probe on the one hand the role played by economic policies (local, national, regional and international) in determining women's access to and control over economic resources and productive assets. On the other, it provides evidence that alternative economic experiences are already taking place on the ground, which offer useful material to ensure women's actual access to sustainable lives and livelihoods.

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\* Edited by Christa Wichterich, WIDE/Heinrich Boell Stiftung, 2010. Available at [www.wide-network.org](http://www.wide-network.org)

The first part includes an introductory chapter which sets the framework of WIDE's vision and work on alternatives. This chapter also presents a comparative analysis of the different case studies, emphasising seminal elements for success and sustainability of economic feminist alternatives.

The second part consists of a collection of short case studies on practical experiences from a wide range of women's organisations. In alliance with other civil society actors, these women are working on the strengthening of economic development and models which are inspired by social and gender justice.

WIDE welcomes readers' reactions and meanwhile wishes you an inspiring reading.

**Bénédicte Allaert**  
WIDE Executive Director

## SECTION I

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Patricia Muñoz Cabrera**

*“In resistance we meet and get to know each other. Not only in pain and rage, but also in hope”.*

*Claudia Koroll*

### 1.1. WIDE: linking alternatives

This is the second publication in the series on economic alternatives published by WIDE. It reflects WIDE's strategic goal of promoting the construction of alternatives to the current dominant economic model from a feminist perspective. A novel element in this publication is that it approaches the debate on economic alternatives from an intersectional viewpoint. By this we mean a perspective that approaches women's human rights as indivisible (economic, social and cultural rights), assumes the rich heterogeneity informing women's struggles in Latin America and perceives this heterogeneity as a source of empowerment which enhances the prospect for social, economic and cultural transformation.

The over-all idea driving the experiences presented here is that there are viable proposals bubbling from below which are stepping stones towards the realisation of truly participatory and sustainable economic models. Thus the publication brings to the fore a wide range of voices, experiences and knowledges<sup>2</sup> from organised women who are currently fighting on the ground to achieve gender and social justice in Latin America. WIDE believes that the proposals put forward in this publication offer valuable insights which should be taken seriously by Latin American and European policymakers.

This publication is also the result of a longstanding collaboration between WIDE and her allies in Latin America. This strategic alliance dates back to 1995 and was strengthened during last year's 'Summit of the People' held in Madrid. On this occasion, WIDE organised a workshop on economic alternatives from women's perspectives and invited some of her Latin American allies to share their experiences and insights with a Latin American and European audience.

The Madrid workshop<sup>3</sup> was not only a great success; it also marked a new step in WIDE's ongoing work on alternatives to the current neoliberal economic model. The knowledge produced in this event permitted WIDE to deepen our insight into the proposals put forward by grassroots women's organisations, and their ability to act, think and make proposals collectively. Thus the main goal of this publication is to bring their proposals to the centre of current debates on sustainable economic models in Europe. In so doing, WIDE hopes to contribute to transnational feminist dialogues which seek to develop socioeconomic models based on equity, equality and justice.

## 1.2. Mapping alternatives in Latin America

### Current challenges

In spite of the evident failure of the current neoliberal model to release Latin America from the legacy of social inequalities informing the development of its economies, the ideology of macroeconomic growth remains as pervasive as it was before the recent crises.

Indeed, several studies demonstrate that in Latin America the interlocking crises of the past three years have brought forth a new cycle of disciplinary policies which have perpetuated the neoliberal economic model that caused the multiple global crises.<sup>4</sup> This new wave of austerity policies includes measures to improve the monitoring of financial markets. This strategy aims to improve the image of the country. It is hoped that an improvement in the image and credibility of the countries will attract greater flows of direct foreign investment to the region; these are desperately needed to sustain macroeconomic growth.<sup>5</sup>

Except for rare exceptions such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, whose economies, it has to be noted, do not completely escape the dominant neoliberal model, a majority of the governments of the region have continued to enforce macroeconomic policies which are largely based upon the short term, without any long-term strategy of sustainable development. This is reflected in efforts by governments to stabilise the national economies in the post-crisis period. These efforts are mostly driven by programmes designed to ensure macroeconomic efficiency, competitiveness and maximisation of profit in the short term and do not take stock of social, political and environmental concerns. The situation has been worsened by an overemphasis on boosting consumption power and a frantic race to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) by opening key sectors such as agriculture and the extrac-



tive industries. Moreover, this new disciplinary wave has boosted speculation in the commodities market, thereby exacerbating the volatility of prices of basic grains.

At the systemic level, these facts demonstrate the politics informing the austerity measures adopted by the governments of the region; they are designed to mitigate the financial crisis rather than replace the dominant economic model. This is clearly the case with current anti-cyclical policies: they reflect governments' preoccupation with adjusting to the present crises rather than their belief in systemic failure.<sup>6</sup>

Worryingly, Latin America is currently affected by what has been called 'financialisation' of its economies.<sup>7</sup> By this we mean the increasing levels of investment which are being directed towards speculation and short-term profit in financial markets. In this new trend, public and private actors continue to collaborate in the construction of a hegemonic transnational order which is exacerbating social polarisation. The generalised context of increased competition to preserve acquired markets and penetrate emerging ones has led to an unprecedented accumulation of capital which has empowered multinational and 'multilatin' companies, as the recent phenomenon of Latin American Transnational companies has been called.<sup>8</sup> This re-ordering corroborates the thesis that the interlocking crises have intensified the climate of social injustice and inequality in Latin America.<sup>9</sup> What prevails is an economic model which privileges consumerism, short-term profitability and productivity and overexploitation of natural resources. This model has been highly detrimental to national development agendas, exposing people and nature to the whims of financial markets.<sup>10</sup>

Analysts have referred to this trend as a new trend towards re-conquering Latin American markets. In their view, this trend was made possible by the wave of privatisations implemented under the structural adjustment policies of the Washington Consensus. In this shifting landscape, investors from Europe, the USA and China are competing to gain control over sectors such as communications, energy, water, banking services, the extractive industries and agriculture.<sup>11</sup>

Empirical evidence shows that the neoliberal model has gained momentum in Latin America, and it is precisely in the area of economic, social and cultural rights of millions of women and men workers where its disenfranchising impact is most noticeable. Macroeconomic policies and policymakers continue to ignore the fact that the current economic model is perpetuating social inequalities in a region that ranks among the most unequal in the world. Moreover, they continue to ignore the fact that foreign direct investment in agriculture and the extractive sector have exacerbated social conflict, dispossession, and varied forms of violence against women. The situation is particularly critical in areas inhabited by indigenous and Afro-descendent men and women.<sup>12</sup> In the current race for land and natural resources

affecting the region, these areas, which in principle should be protected for their rich biodiversity, have become assets disputed by multinational and multilatin companies. A study on the impact of monoculture, backed by foreign direct investment, on Brazilian black and indigenous women compellingly puts it:

*“These regions have seen the growth of poverty and unemployment; both have exacerbated violence and an exodus from rural areas. In terms of specific impacts on women, an increase in prostitution has been observed in areas where monoculture plantations are most prevalent.”<sup>13</sup>*

Many women’s movements, in alliance with progressive feminist academics, activists and wider social movements have denounced the increasing levels of violence and social conflict generated by the current dominant model. In the same way, they have warned against the disenfranchising consequences of the increased commercialisation of life, of social relations, and of biodiversity.

### **Building alternatives in Latin America**

Building viable alternatives to global capitalism takes a long time and is not exempt from dilemmas and contradictions. Taking this complexity into account, the alternatives emerging in Latin America cover a wide range of economic, social, political and cultural issues which cannot be fully addressed in the limited space devoted to this introductory chapter. Generally speaking, many of the proposals include elements of ‘solidarity economy’ (*economía solidaria*) as alternatives to the neoliberal economic paradigm. For example, we can mention micro-models of popular entrepreneurship which combine monetary exchanges and bargaining, agroecology-based agriculture, community-managed modes of production and trading, participatory models of grassroots entrepreneurship, cooperative housing projects, collective management of technologies appropriate to local ecosystems, food projects aiming to preserve healthy patterns of food consumption. One specific alternative that has gained momentum is the paradigm of food sovereignty proposed by Via Campesina and to which movements such as Movimento Sem Terra in Brazil and the Network of Women Transforming Economy (REMTE), among others, have adhered.<sup>14</sup> On the long list of proposals, one should note the contribution of the Brazilian Women’s Organisation (AMB) and the Mercosur Feminist Network (AFM). These organisations have recently begun to rethink the current economic and development models from a feminist standpoint that is simultaneously anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-heterosexist.<sup>15</sup>

At the level of governments, there are so far no economic models which can be

fully considered alternatives to the current neoliberal capitalist model. However, one should acknowledge the consistent work done by some governments – mostly in the South American region – to transform the current market-led capitalist model through new policies and legislation that see the rights of workers, indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples as central to social and economic policymaking.<sup>16</sup> Such is the case of Venezuela, where the very idea of Nation-State has been redefined. As a result, at the national level, the State has been repositioned as an overarching regulator of economic and financial activity. This reordering reflects the Venezuelan project of popular socialist economy currently implemented by the government. However, these efforts to reshape the national economy occur within a global arena of increased speculation and short-term investment in which the State also participates through its companies.<sup>17</sup>

Two other countries where paradigmatic changes have taken place are Bolivia and Ecuador. Even though the model of socioeconomic development proposed by these two governments cannot be said to escape the ‘logics of the extractivist market’, as some analysts contend, the newly drafted Constitutions – in particular, the redefinition of nature as a subject entitled to rights within the paradigm of *Buen Vivir*/*vivir bien* – represent a significant step towards shifting the social and cultural mindset of the region.

The paradigm of *Buen Vivir* deserves a special note because of the significance it has gained at continental level.<sup>18</sup> This paradigm represents a transformation without precedent in more than five centuries of history of the continent. It is rooted in indigenous epistemology and bears a strong relation with the emancipatory struggles fought by indigenous peoples since the Conquest. At its core is the struggle against racist, cultural and economic hegemony and the disenfranchisement caused by capitalism-driven colonial power. The paradigm of *Buen Vivir* proposes a radical rethinking of what we call ‘modern civilisation’. It is argued that in Latin America one should reread this concept through the lenses of the complex social reality of the continent and the legacy of the Conquest. Concretely, *Buen Vivir* redefines the Nation-State as a pluri-cultural and pluri-lingual State whose primary task should be to promote and regulate a social, cultural and economic model driven by equity, human dignity, and social and environmental justice. In this paradigm, the issue of entitlements is a crucial one. This means that not only people but also nature are subjects entitled to rights. From this perspective, nature becomes a global common, which means that we are all responsible for its protection and preservation.

One important aspect of the *Buen Vivir* paradigm is that it is dialogic; that is to say, it rejects the false oppositions inherent in capitalism (the economic vs. the social; the productive vs. the reproductive; the micro vs. the macro)- *Buen Vivir*<sup>18</sup> is driven by

the idea of redistributive justice: equity in the distribution of wealth and resources and equality of conditions, not only of opportunities. Within this paradigm, redistributive justice is fundamental to make labour and production contribute to the economic, social and cultural well-being of human subjects, the full enjoyment of their human rights and the well-being of nature. In the *Buen Vivir* paradigm, the economy is put to the test: it must contribute to the improvement of human rights for all and to the sustainable preservation of our finite global commons (water, land, biodiversity). Just like any other complex paradigm, *Buen Vivir* presents some important challenges: one of them relates to the emphasis on women as reproducers of life. This idea raises controversy if we consider women's historical struggle to have the right to full enjoyment of their sexual and reproductive rights regardless of their roles as procreators.

At the geopolitical level, *Buen Vivir* is in line with holistic approaches to the interlocking crises affecting our planet; it assumes the environmental, financial and food crises as inextricable from one another. The premise is that we are undergoing a systemic crisis and the multiple crises affecting us today are symptoms of the collapse of a hegemonic worldview which, despite overwhelming evidence, continues to push for a predatory model of economic development as if nothing had happened. It is assumed that the current economic model has commodified nature, without taking into account the finite character of our planet's resources.<sup>19</sup>

Thus *Buen Vivir* calls for a radical abandonment of the logics of profit maximisation and capital accumulation imposed by the neoliberal model. It embraces the idea of solidarity economy, wherein the human activity of production and social reproduction benefits both individual and collective well-being, and this based on values such as respect for nature, dialogue between cultures, and human dignity.<sup>20</sup> Since its emergence in Bolivia and Ecuador, this paradigm has taken root throughout the continent and has been discussed in transnational gatherings on alternatives to the current model of capital accumulation. Recently, academics and activists from Europe and Latin America gathered in Spain to exchange theoretical and empirically based knowledge on alternatives from the perspective of degrowth and *Buen Vivir*.<sup>21</sup> These two paradigms share a concern with the finite nature of our planet's resources and a special preoccupation with the depletion of global ecosystems due to irresponsible overconsumption of resources and the ensuing generation of waste.

Significantly, the paradigms of degrowth and *Buen Vivir* are contributing to the weaving of transnational knowledges from the distinctive perspective of social movements and of women's rights. This confirms the fact that although alternatives to hegemonic models take a long time before yielding concrete results at the macro level, the thinking and acting to transform unequal patterns of production

and consumption has already begun. Moreover, the transformative ideas fuelling these initiatives are increasingly shared by grassroots communities in local areas. In this collaborative process of social transformation, women's movements, along with broader social movements, are playing a key role. Undoubtedly, the intersection between degrowth and *Buen Vivir* opens new ground for transnational and global debates while at the same time energising feminist macroeconomic analysis from an intersectional perspective.

### 1.3. Proposals from a feminist, women's rights perspective

In Latin America, contributions from feminist theorists and activists have pointed in two directions. On the one hand, efforts have been directed to transform the economy so that gender becomes endogenous to macroeconomics. On the other hand, efforts have been made to revamp debates on solidarity economy from the perspective of gender and social justice. In both cases, gender equity has been redefined as a non-negotiable component of macroeconomic thinking. In both cases, the proposals criticise and redefine the spaces in which macroeconomics operates. For instance, they demonstrate the correlation between the macro and micro levels and the importance of considering how they influence each other (what has been called the meso level).<sup>22</sup> Second, and in line with feminist thinkers from other regions of the world, they have exposed the 'omnipotent patriarchal system' shaping neo-classical economic theory, showing that it operates in global, national and local spaces. A major contention is that this system shapes the mindset of economic decision-makers, of international financial institutions, of public institutions in each country, and defines the economic policies and practices at macro and micro level.<sup>23</sup>

At the symbolic level, this omnipotent 'patriarchal' system defines women as undifferentiated and disposable subjects. In practice, it establishes social hierarchies and power differentials among excluded social groups. As a result, women, who are defined as structurally subordinated to men, endure manifold discriminations which will vary according to their specific social locations. This process of social differentiation makes women workers vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and multiple forms of violence, which, in many cases, take place with institutional and social impunity.<sup>24</sup> Put bluntly, one may say that under the ruling economic model in Latin America, being a woman, poor, and a member of a social group defined as inferior to a dominant elite is sometimes chronicle of an announced death.<sup>25</sup>

A second domain of feminist deconstruction has been to reveal the primacy of the market over development agendas. In this way, feminist analysis has exposed the limits of neoliberal capitalism and its disenfranchising impact on the rights of

women workers in the labour market. A major argument is that this model perpetuates unequal distribution of wealth and resources, discriminatory access to public goods and privileges those agents of power who rule over the predominant division of labour.<sup>26</sup>

A third significant feminist achievement is the reposition of social reproduction as a fundamental element of macroeconomic theory and in clear rejection of neo-classical economic theory which limits analysis to the productive, monetarist and mercantile aspects.<sup>27</sup> The theoretical insights put forward propose rethinking the economy in a way that ensures an equitable redistribution of productive assets and of the work involved in social reproduction.<sup>28</sup> Thus scholars such as Almeida have proposed reconceptualising labour so as to dismantle the market ideology which establishes a false opposition between the productive and the reproductive and which defines social reproduction as an essentially feminine endeavour.<sup>29</sup> The proposals put forward by Latin American feminists echo those of European feminist economists who have incorporated social reproduction into economic thinking by means of three main parameters of inclusion: recognition, reduction and redistribution of the responsibilities involved in social reproduction.<sup>30</sup>

Transforming the colonialist and patriarchal structure of the Nation-State in Latin America is a fourth site of feminist struggle in Latin America. Thanks to the feminist critique of the current ideology of patriarchy-driven productivism,<sup>31</sup> the correlation between the triple systemic oppression of women (racism, patriarchy, capitalism) has been mainstreamed into the economic arena. The contention is that these three discriminatory systems operate in tandem and reinforce each other. However, challenges remain on how to make racism become more fully embedded in economic theory. In this direction, alliances between feminist, indigenous and Afro-descendent women's movements should be more consistently promoted and accompanied.

Generally speaking, feminist deconstructive analysis in Latin America has been highly beneficial to women. In the first place, feminist critical readings of macroeconomics have demonstrated that women have been incorporated into the labour market in conditions of structural subordination. Second, they have shown that because of the patriarchal segmentation of labour markets, women are highly invisible as productive agents, hyper-visible as primarily responsible for social reproduction and as providers of cheap labour. In extreme cases, and because of their constructed inferiority, they are perceived as expendable subjects.

### 1.3.1. Refloating subjectivities: indigenous and Afro-descendent women as subjects entitled to rights

One cannot speak of alternatives to neoliberal capitalism in Latin America without referring to the proposals put forward by indigenous and Afro-descendent women. From their perspective, a fundamental issue in the debate on alternatives is the historical racism and discrimination shaping the socio-political and economic development of the region.<sup>32</sup>

What is at stake for these women is the transformation of a dominant culture (which they perceive as racist, capitalist and predatory of the Earth's resources) into a culture of care and protection of the human rights of people and the rights of the Earth.<sup>33</sup> In order to achieve this, the struggle must aim to decolonise and de-patriarchalise the State (its institutions, policies and decision-makers) and the social mindset of the region. It is argued that this transformation is an indispensable step towards a new logic of accumulation. In this new logic, women's human rights as individual subjects are understood as complementary with their collective rights (for instance, as indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples).

For indigenous women in particular, *Buen Vivir* is especially important for two reasons. First, it has provided them with an opportunity to validate their discredited knowledges. Second, from a political and socioeconomic viewpoint, it has permitted them to occupy social and political space. As a result, they have become more visible and empowered in debating arenas, both nationally and internationally. In both arenas, they have managed to articulate their demands for an anti-racist and anti-discriminatory society, for their right to combat gender discrimination from their own communities and for recognition of their individual and collective rights.

Some of the *Buen Vivir* proposals put forward by indigenous women voice the concerns of anti-systemic feminist thought. For instance, both share a deep concern with moving toward the construction of a socioeconomic development paradigm that is liberating and emancipatory – a model that eradicates racism, inequity, inequalities and structural violence. In short, both appear to advocate for a model that rebukes a monetarist and ethnocentric idea of progress and punishes the over-exploitation of the Earth's resources.<sup>34</sup>

In the past years, *Buen Vivir* has strengthened alliances between indigenous women's organisations, feminist organisations and women's movements in Latin America and Europe. Networks such as the Latin American Network of Women Transforming the Economy (REMTE) have been inspired by this paradigm and proposed an 'economy for life', which locates the struggle for justice for women on the same

plane as justice for nature.<sup>35</sup> As Irene Leon explains, the need is to envisage theoretical and political frameworks that redefine the economy on the basis of an idea of sustainability of human life and of the resources of the planet. This entails transformations in “the productive matrix, in visions and policies relating to who shapes the economy and how it is put into practice, what and how to produce, what and how to consume; finally, how to reproduce life.”<sup>36</sup>

### **1.3.2. Towards a feminist solidarity economy**

In Latin America, the theoretical and political efforts promoting a feminist solidarity economy have been geared towards the construction of a socioeconomic development model that is sustainable at the social, cultural, economic and ecological level. This model is value-based, and embraces inclusive solidarity and legislation guaranteeing women’s full enjoyment of their fundamental rights. Reinterpreting Marxist theory, some feminists have highlighted the importance of equality and social equity in the construction of models that can supersede neoliberal capitalism. In their re-interpretation, feminist thinkers locate solidarity economy in sharp contrast to the individualist capitalist economic model.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, they emphasise the importance of contextualised models of solidarity economy that are rooted in the culture, knowledge, wisdom and production patterns of those who produce the goods.<sup>38</sup>

The call has also been made to work towards the construction of models that deconstruct the fundamental tenets of capitalism from a feminist perspective. This means combating (in theory and practice) the pervasive social hierarchies, the sexual division of labour, the private accumulation of capital, the cultural myth of the heterosexual nuclear family, and the socially constructed image of women as subordinated social subjects.<sup>39</sup> Other proposals suggest that we should move beyond economics so as to broaden the critical rereading of the intersecting inequalities at work in Latin American economies. In short, it is argued that the global challenges we are facing today are too complex to be fully comprehended by macroeconomic analysis. Hence the proposal is to engage in transdisciplinary feminist analysis of the economy in order to critically examine the sociological, historical, cultural and political implications of the economic policies being drafted and implemented in national contexts and global decision-making arenas. As Quintela puts it, the greatest challenge is to be able to assess the well-being of society by incorporating all the human activities that contribute to its pursuit, not just the economic side of it.<sup>40</sup>



### 1.3.3. Beyond gender: revisiting the intersectionality of power within the economy

Another major contribution of feminist economic analysis is to have exposed the degree of gender blindness and gender injustice affecting macroeconomic policies and practices. In fact, theoretical and empirically based insights demonstrate that, even in countries with progressive governments, economic policymaking continues to overlook the discriminatory nature of the present model of market-based capitalism.<sup>41</sup>

However, while achievements have been made to incorporate gender in economic analysis, the intersectional nature of women's oppression raises an important challenge to the construction of anti-hegemonic feminist paradigms. Despite the bulk of empirical evidence justifying its historical, theoretical and socio-political salience, intersectional analysis of women's differentiated position in macroeconomic policy remains a pending issue for feminist analysis in Latin America. Clearly, progress has been made on the constructed nature of what we call 'social subjectivities'; progress has also been made in terms of the multiple power structures disenfranchising women. However, much remains to be done in terms of building methodological and theoretical frameworks that incorporate the complex power differentials informing women's lives and livelihoods in societies historically constructed upon intersecting inequalities (of gender, class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality).

For instance, efforts to address the gender/race intersection in feminist macroeconomic analysis are still rare. To a great extent, anti-racist feminist scholars do not engage in economic analysis, and feminist economists who engage in gender analysis often overlook the role played by racism in women's productive and reproductive agency.<sup>42</sup>

In order to move forward on this critical path, Matthaei has proposed incorporating an anti-racist critique in economic analysis. She argues that race and ethnicity are central to enhancing our understanding of how economic and political relations work. The specific reality of multiple and simultaneous discriminations affecting indigenous and Afro-descendent women in Latin America corroborates her thesis. They are invisible in macroeconomic policies and hyper-visible in the care economy and the informal economy. Matthaei's thesis invites us to reconsider intersectionality as a tool for more complex and differentiated analysis of women's status in macroeconomic policymaking in general, and in labour markets in particular. She reminds us that inequalities are intersectional and socially constructed; therefore, they can be dismantled.<sup>43</sup>

## 2. PRESENTATION OF THE EXPERIENCES

The eight experiences presented in the following chapters take us on a journey through alternatives to the neoliberal economic model currently being designed and implemented by grassroots women in Latin America. The protagonists are women who are fighting from their rural and urban contexts and in alliance with researchers, members of national parliaments, activists and other women and men committed to social justice and gender justice.

The articles offer innovative examples of micro-models of solidarity economy which are critical and defined according to women's contextual realities. These micro-models aim to fulfil the practical, productive and strategic needs of women, and emphasise the importance of gender equality and social equity in the construction of a just development model. Moreover, they stress the need to achieve a culture of non-violence – in particular, a culture that eradicates all forms of violence against women. This includes a radical contestation of the economic violence generated by the neoliberal economic model. In the same way, the experiences highlight the added value of holistic visions of development. They tell us that holistic or integral approaches are more appropriate for they take stock of the multidimensional nature of economic development, the power relations affecting (macro- and micro-) economic policies and practices, and the complex heterogeneity of women on the ground.

Altogether, the eight good practices demonstrate that social, political and economic empowerment continues to be a key issue for grassroots women, because it paves the way to enforcing legislation so that economic policies and practices do not hamper women's human rights. The articles offer valuable insights into a vision of development which has been defined from the specificity of women engaged in a daily struggle to transform themselves as well as their environment. For instance, the Guatemalan article presents two experiences which make a compelling case for food sovereignty from the perspective of indigenous women. From these two experiences of rural development, the author draws links with the Guatemalan export-led development model to claim women's universal right to adequate food and to water. The article highlights the key role of indigenous women farmers in sustainable agriculture, showing their power to negotiate spaces for political and economic change despite the conditions of structural vulnerability affecting their lives and livelihoods. This experience is especially important because it shows how elderly, wise Mayan women emerge as assertive agents of social transformation in a country where elderly women are often considered and treated as invisible social subjects. The experience validates their knowledge on biodiversity and on effective

management of seed reserves, a key issue in the current global food crisis. Fighting against all odds, Mayan women have managed to develop a micro-model of food sovereignty which has proven to be beneficial to them and their communities. As the author explains, the work of the ADEMI women is inspired by a model of food sovereignty as a political option and which can be summarised as follows:

*“Starting from their own culture, they are defending their modes of production and their way of living. For this reason, in addition to producing vegetables, they are actively engaged in the creation of spaces where issues related to food sovereignty can be discussed at local level. This includes the family, community and authorities.”*

A striking feature of the ADEMI experience is the power of elderly Mayan women to empower themselves and others. In this sense, the author clearly portrays them as agents of social transformation: they improve their livelihoods, contribute to improvements in the livelihoods of their communities and struggle to change the political and cultural mindset. Confronted with the threat of agribusiness, land-grabbing and extractive activities of big companies exploiting resources which are crucial to their self-sustenance, the ADEMI women respond with development strategies that are sustainable in the short and the long term. These strategies have been designed according to valuable empirical knowledge accumulated over centuries and passed down from generation to generation. This knowledge respects their culture of production and trading and their management of natural resources.

Another major achievement of the ADEMI wise women is to have shifted the cultural mindset of their communities, male peers in particular. The good results achieved through agroecology have caught the attention of the local authorities and men producers, who are asking ADEMI members to train them to “improve their techniques of organic agriculture”. At the political level, the ADEMI women have been able to validate the discredited knowledges of Mayan women farmers and producers. Moreover, they have strengthened the image of Mayan women farmers as producers of healthy food. Thirdly, they have joined forces with others to question local authorities for the development model they are promoting and implementing:

*“They have opposed the conventional model (modified seeds, polluting pesticides, export-led agricultural model) with an agroecological model. This model is enshrined in their cosmology, and respects Mother Earth. These spaces have allowed women to present their proposals for a model based upon food sovereignty. Even though the theme is not well known among local authorities, it has attracted a lot of attention.”*

In line with the first experience, the second best practice presented by the Guatemalan author, a member of the Food Sovereignty Network herself, invites us to rethink macroeconomics along the principles of food sovereignty. This specific experience denounces the destructive impact of the neoliberal model on Guatemalan agriculture – in particular, its disenfranchising effects on indigenous women’s right to water and to adequate food, in conformity with international protocols and conventions.<sup>44</sup> In this experience, the author establishes linkages between the macroeconomic policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund, Guatemala’s dependency on an export-led development model, and lack of access to water. The author emphasises the devastating impact of denial of adequate water to women and Guatemalan girls, especially if we consider that they are often responsible for water provision in the household. Water shortages produced by unequal distribution of this element entail longer walking hours for women and girls, and this is affecting girls’ access to formal education and women’s capacity to generate income. To these negative impacts, one should add women’s feeling constantly tired and health and sanitary problems.

The two Guatemalan good practices put forward a concrete proposal for food sovereignty that is proving to be effective at the local level in four significant ways. First, it is extremely useful in terms of ensuring self-sufficiency of women and their communities. Second, it opens new avenues for transforming gender-unjust relations between men and women. Third, it shows how to preserve biodiversity and seeds which are fundamental to ensure the right to adequate food and water of future generations. Lastly, it proposes a socioeconomic model inspired in the principles of dignity and human rights: Mayan farmers – and anyone, for that matter – have the right to develop endogenous models of production and redistribution.

In line with Guatemala, the Argentina article presents the struggle of rural women to preserve a tradition of ‘family agricultural markets’ inspired by food sovereignty and solidarity economy. The author explains that these family food markets are perceived by many as an alternative to the growing impoverishment of farmers due to the unprecedented accumulation of private land and wealth resulting from neoliberal policies of the 1990s. Concretely, the family food markets have improved the livelihoods of thousands of women and men farmers and their families. In addition to this, they have revalorised local markets and are contributing to the preservation of healthy consumption patterns. As a result, these food markets have become increasingly popular, especially among consumers wishing to consume healthy and fresh products. These markets also promote women’s participation: 80% of those who are trading during market hours are women.

Other elements of the family food markets which show their adherence to principles of solidarity economy are: a) they promote family agriculture and the production chain is controlled by 'family production units'; b) members are organised as non-profitable associations; c) there are no intermediaries, the relationship between producer and consumer is direct and the prices are fair; d) they promote agroecology and protection of the environment; e) they prioritise production for local consumption; f) they strengthen the social fabric of the community; and g) leaders use their bargaining power in their relations with local authorities. This bargaining often deals with models of local development which are appropriate to the context and culture of those who produce and trade in food markets. Just like the Guatemalan good practices, the experience from Argentina underscores the key role played by women producers:

*"To leave the parcels... and to be in contact with... consumers ... meant for women producers a break in their isolation; it meant sociability and empowerment. Trading their products promotes dialogue, negotiation and intersubjectivity. The women discovered that there were other ways to be woman, more independent. ... The creation of the food markets meant that women began to earn money for their work, to handle and to receive cash every week."*

To these important gains one should add changes in gender relations among young women, specifically in terms of the sexual division of labour in the household, violence against women, and sexual and reproductive health. Another gain is an increase in women's participation in mixed organisations working in solidarity economy.

Despite the achievements, important challenges remain; some are currently under negotiation, while others are more structural. For example, greater involvement from Argentinean local authorities is needed so that these food markets do not end up as marginal palliatives to a structural problem. Another big challenge is changing the cultural mindset. The pervasive -'patriarchal model of the male breeder'- continues to subordinate women producers and traders, relegating them to a secondary economic role or simply to the domestic space. There is also a great imbalance in leadership positions within the organisations, since most of their top leaders are men. Critically aware of these challenges, women are implementing strategies of awareness-raising and empowerment. The aim is to shift the mindset of their male peers. At the broader level, this struggle reaffirms women's capacity to struggle against patriarchy from within, to assume gender equity as endogenous to solidarity economy and to envision creative options to the capitalist-driven agribusiness which is impoverishing them.

From Ecuador and Mexico the authors present two cases of ecotourism led by indigenous women entrepreneurs – Kichwa women in Ecuador and Nahua women in Mexico. From a business perspective, these experiences show different levels of development, and both highlight the significance of solidarity economy in ecotourism small businesses led by indigenous women. With Guatemala, these experiences share a vision of economic development based on the accumulated knowledges, culture and values of indigenous women farmers. Through ecotourism, these local women entrepreneurs seek to generate income to meet their needs and those of others in their communities. They are also aware that production and biodiversity conservation are inseparable. Three major elements define the alternative value of the experiences of Mexico and Ecuador: equal redistribution of profits, the sharing of surplus among more vulnerable members of the community, and a constant practice of environmental preservation.

The article from Ecuador documents the case of 22 Kichwa women who, faced with discrimination, social exclusion and indifference from local authorities, decided to organise themselves and create a small ecotourism business as an alternative way to economic and cultural empowerment. Gradually, the women of the Amukishmi association<sup>45</sup> have managed to develop a micro-model of socioeconomic entrepreneurship which has broken their isolation, has made them more assertive, and has enabled them to occupy public spaces and generate income for themselves and other community members. As the narrator tells us, these women are managers of constructive change: with their livelihoods threatened by multinationals on the one hand and by public indifference on the other, they are using alternative knowledges to preserve biodiversity, are fighting for their rights as women and as people, and are struggling to become visible as productive agents in the local labour market.

The experience of the Nahua women in Mexico is at a more developed stage and is perhaps one of the most effective experiences of ecotourism led by indigenous women entrepreneurs in the region. This entrepreneurial project of solidarity economy was born out of the desire of a group of Nahua women to set up an organisation through which they could directly work on the realisation of their productive, practical and strategic needs. At the heart of their desire for empowerment was gender subordination within indigenous cooperatives and the incapacity of male leaders to assume women as subjects with “the capabilities and rights required to lead their own organisational processes”. Even though the struggle against racism and class discrimination united Nahua men and women farmers, gender bias led women to resist from within. However, they did not lose sight of the necessary dialogue and interaction with indigenous cooperatives and the national indigenous movement to which they belong and identify with.

The experiences of Colombia and Bolivia are inspired by an idea of community-based entrepreneurship that breaks with normative models of micro-entrepreneurship. The main objective of this experience is to enhance the organisational and bargaining power of women living in conditions of acute social exclusion in urban and rural areas. Many of these women entrepreneurs are farmers, informal workers, factory workers, women migrants who share a sense of collective belonging: they define themselves as members of indigenous and Afro-descendent communities and identify the export-led agricultural model as the main obstacle towards the achievement of food security and food sovereignty. Many of these women are girls and elderly women who have survived the violence generated by armed conflict, land dispossession, forced displacement, poverty-led migration and exploitation in labour markets.

Through their activities, these women workers claim their right to engage in economic activities that do not replicate the forms of violence they have endured under the dominant economic model. They also claim their right to produce according to models that do not harm human beings or nature. The major idea at work in these two experiences is women's empowerment as a crucial means to achieve enhanced levels of economic, social, cultural and political agency. As both authors argue, women are struggling to defend local models of socioeconomic development, to reconstruct the social fabric of their communities and to offer an alternative to the growing individualism brought forth by consumerist capitalism.

The Venezuelan experience presents a model of microfinance which seeks to empower women in socially vulnerable areas. This model is implemented by Banmujer, a public microfinance bank led by women and inspired by a national project of socialist popular economy. The novel thing about this microfinance model is that it not only aspires to empower women economically and politically but also culturally. In other words, the goal is to use microfinance as a means to transform the power relations subordinating women and denying their enjoyment of their fundamental rights. The political framework which defines the work of Banmujer assumes women as "subjects entitled to rights" and "gender equity" as an "ethical imperative" embedded in social justice and human rights. In other words, a rights-based approach to development with equity, dignity and solidarity is embedded in microfinance. It is assumed that gender equity is fundamental to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes.

Basically, the ultimate goal of microfinance is to eradicate all inequalities. The women leaders of Banmujer believe that this can be achieved by introducing equality as a normative principle in the political, economic and social arena. What distinguishes the microfinance model proposed by Banmujer from the poverty-alleviation pro-

grammes implemented by the World Bank and other international organisations is the interconnection between dimensions which are consistently kept apart in the policies promoted by international financial institutions (namely, the economic and the social, the macro and the micro level). Banmujer's model originates from a macro-level strategy to eradicate inequality and discrimination and links up to the micro level through empowerment of women so that they subvert the unequal structures of power affecting them at the local level. As the authors of the article explain, women decide the projects they want to submit on the basis of their own priorities and culture of production. Banmujer prioritises those projects that promote "socio-productive" initiatives. By this they mean projects that benefit both individuals and communities.

The main idea fuelling Banmujer's work is to help women out of the poverty circle through what they call "the economy of the small". This means a microfinance model that satisfies individual and collective needs, energises local development and contributes to improvements in the livelihoods of men and women living in popular areas, and in their social and productive power. The economy of the small seeks to improve their well-being and their *Buen Vivir*. As the authors put it, the economy of the small:

"... values and highlights the creative powers and knowledges of people from popular areas ... their exchange, service-providing and organisational culture, and with them the contributions of women, heroines of everyday life, in popular areas."

In line with the government's programme to transform the Venezuelan economy, the microfinance model implemented by Banmujer aspires to enhance the productive and transformative power of women from the most excluded areas so that they can more effectively struggle for the eradication of the manifold discriminations at work in Venezuelan society. In short, micro-credit is assumed as a solidarity tool through which social transformation can be achieved at three distinctive levels: in terms of women's livelihoods, in the economic sphere and the cultural mindset. To achieve this, Banmujer has developed an intersectional vision of public microfinance which assumes that women's exclusion and poverty are the result of the interaction of three factors: gender, class and ethnic discrimination.

The study from Peru presents the struggle towards organisational strengthening and leadership of women workers in the informal economy. This experience highlights the increasing feminisation of both poverty and the informal market. The already precarious condition of many women in poor households is worsened by the inconsistent behaviour of local authorities: they offer much but deliver little, if



anything at all. This case study emphasises the transforming power of networking as a means to enhance the political influence of women in the informal economy. It shows how transformative models of advocacy work can be an effective means to convince local authorities of the urgency to enforce the labour rights of these women. The advocacy and lobbying strategy proposed is highly relevant to the realities of women workers on the ground, and it has helped them to enhance their assertiveness and knowledge of issues that are central to their political agenda. Moreover, they have successfully raised awareness among Members of Parliament (some have even taken their demands to Parliament), union workers and political decision-makers. Thanks to their sustained lobbying, their case has become known among the general public.

From Bolivia, the author presents the experience of Ricomida, a women-led chain of food distribution in poor areas of Cochabamba. This income-generating project promotes economic justice for women through three main strategies: gender, interculturalism and political influence. Ricomida (meaning ‘delicious food’ in Spanish) dates from 2006, and emerged as a small family business led by women. The idea driving this project is solidarity economy, and the goal is to provide an alternative to women who would otherwise be forced into taking precarious, poorly paid, highly risky temporary jobs. The main features of Ricomida are the promotion of individual and collective profit-making, the possibility for women to work near their family, and family and community access to nutritious food. A revolving fund ensures access to credit to improve service delivery and the quality of meals offered to the public. At the community level, Ricomida offers low-income community members the possibility of accessing good-quality meals at affordable prices. The feminist organisation that accompanies this initiative follows the model of ‘feminist critical economy’. Its central elements can be summarised as:

- a) eradication of the economic invisibility of women in neoclassical economic thought;
- b) conceptual redefinition of labour and deconstruction of the androcentric world vision that locates men as the only subject and agent of economic, social and cultural change;
- c) rejection of the false opposition between production and reproduction.

On a broader level, the Ricomida project stresses the importance of urban spaces in transforming patterns of food consumption, especially if one considers the devastating impact of junk food in our eating culture. The Bolivian study echoes many of the eight experiences presented in this publication. It tells us that for social transformation to be long-lasting, it must happen at the micro (local) and macro level. In policy terms, this means that continued support to women producers, farmers and

entrepreneurs is much needed so that they can effectively combine their economic activities with political work on human rights and on preservation of the ecosystems in which the economic activity is developed.

## 2.1. Building alternatives from women's perspectives

As a whole, the eight case studies demonstrate that empowering social transformation for Latin American women and society as a whole is possible. Their greater merit is that they showcase the struggle of grassroots women to construct a society based on the principles of redistributive justice and a life free from violence, in particular the forms of violence generated by the current neoliberal economic model. The case studies build upon the experiential knowledge of women who have been key contributors to socioeconomic development but who nevertheless remain invisible subjects in macroeconomic analysis.

They also show that grassroots women, along with their allies, have managed to redefine women as agents of socioeconomic and cultural change. Social recognition has been slow, but it has come (from communities, cooperatives, authorities, Members of Parliament). Many are recognised as knowledgeable agents in sustainable agriculture, as contributors to alternative models of economic leadership and small-scale entrepreneurship.

The methodological and strategic approaches used by these women reflect their power to transform oppression and discrimination into opportunities for individual and organisational collective empowerment. The implementation of initiatives inspired by solidarity economy permits them to enhance their economic agency, thus improving their livelihoods and those of their families and communities. Moreover, they become stronger as agents of socio-political change: they advocate to influence the policies and practices affecting their lives and struggle to dismantle the cultural ideologies affecting the economy and which define women as universally subordinated to men.

Certainly, these experiences follow the proposals put forward by feminist academics and activists who have stated that there can be no social justice or *Buen Vivir* without gender justice, and that this can only be achieved through equal distribution of wealth, resources and the work involved in social reproduction. The experiences also compel us to rethink the economy from the complexity of women's everyday existence. In this sense, they expose the fissures of the capitalist system from below,

unveiling the logics of domination at work in local spaces and their interconnection with power structures at the macro level.

The articles show varying degrees of criticism, a fact that reflects the complex heterogeneity of the region, the power asymmetries defining economic, political, social and cultural relations and the different degrees of liberalisation of their economies. Responses to the dominant economic model also vary: some women construct alternatives of economic emancipation from within the model, others adopt hybrid models, and others, such as the Guatemalan experience, propose an alternative that is anti-systemic in that it rejects the current pattern of capital accumulation engrained in the development model implemented by the State.

One of the most important aspects of these experiences is women's strong will and capacity to organise around a shared agenda of economic and political change. These are women who come from different sectors and social groups and who share a common desire to put an end to poverty and disenfranchisement as well as to the policies and political actors that perpetuate both. The case studies bear witness to the great value of strategic synergies in the achievement of change goals: grassroots women, progressive feminist activists and researchers, progressive women politicians and field analysts are weaving collective knowledges on micro-models of solidarity economy. If scaled up to the macro level, these experiences can furnish sustainable ways out of the entanglement of crises affecting our world.

Another idea binding these experiences is their concern with the political, social and economic emancipation of women. Through their projects, women become critically conscious of the fact that it is not only through economic empowerment that they will eradicate the power structures subordinating them; the struggle to build a just and truly inclusive society must be fought at the cultural level too.

Close analysis of these experiences shows their great value in rethinking our way of living and the world we live in. In this direction, the proposals furnish empirically-based knowledge which can be useful to strengthen ongoing work on transforming the economy in the region and globally:

- a) Concretely, they offer grounded knowledge on models of solidarity and popular economy which address the power relations inherent in macroeconomic theory, policies and practices.
- b) They also propose rethinking the economy so that not only gender inequality but also the economic, social and cultural rights of women are assumed as constitutive elements of macroeconomic analysis. To grassroots women, the human rights dimension of economic policies is a key issue. Regrettably, it continues to be overlooked by macroeconomic theory.

c) They insist on the correlation between macroeconomic policies and their impact at the micro level (households, communities, local labour markets). In this sense, they follow the critical line established by macroeconomic feminist analysis: in a genuinely alternative economic paradigm, not only gender equity is endogenous to economics; the division between macroeconomics and microeconomics has been artificially created (largely by male theorists) and does not reflect social reality. In material life, both constitute different angles of the economy and should not be dissociated. Moreover, both provide fundamental tools for a deep understanding of how social systems operate and, in particular, how an entire economy is shaped, managed, sustained and developed. To different degrees, the articles compel us to rethink the economy in terms of the linkages between the macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. This becomes more relevant when we consider the key role of the State and public institutions in the unequal distribution of power, wealth and resources, and in the pervasive segmentation of labour markets.

d) The case studies demonstrate that participatory processes of economic transformation are also political and cultural. It is not enough to transform the economy; systemic transformation requires deconstructing the dominant mindset. From the case studies, women's preoccupation with shifting mindsets emerges as a clear political goal, and it is tied to their economic empowerment. Women on the ground are painstakingly struggling to eradicate the patriarchal culture at work in their communities, in the mindset of key policymakers, political actors and of society at large. Their struggles also emphasise the role of critical consciousness in processes of social transformation – in particular, in cases when hegemonic power structures must be fought against.

e) The experiences also reposition the relationship between labour and capital. Women enjoy the benefits of their income-generating activities. In many cases, they share the surplus among themselves and manage to create revolving funds that benefit their businesses or help community members living in conditions of acute social vulnerability. In the idea of solidarity economy conveyed through the eight case studies, there are no exploited women working in Export Processing Zones (maquilas), there are no women risking their lives in mining megaprojects, no women working their lives away as seasonal workers in the agribusiness, no women farmers growing or picking fruit and vegetables they cannot eat (as illustrated in the Guatemalan story). Compellingly, in the emancipatory narratives conveyed by the articles, women are designing models of production and economic entrepreneurship that are highly participatory and which contribute to reinforcing the social fabric of their communities. This participatory culture is not coincidental. It is a political option driven by a broader idea of social justice that does not end in women's em-

powerment but includes working with men from different sectors towards shared change goals.

f) They reposition women's agency (social, economic and political) as the ultimate goal of empowerment. Thanks to their consistent struggle to transform themselves and others, women become empowered agents who can exert various levels of social, economic and cultural influence in their respective contexts. In some cases, women can effectively intervene and transform the very structures of local markets and the mindset of those power agents shaping them.

g) They redefine production and social reproduction as indivisible: they are two humps of the same camel. In distinctive ways, and through their organised actions, grassroots women seek to deconstruct the cultural myth that defines social reproduction as a women's issue. There are clear examples of women engaged in raising awareness on the urgent need for a new care economy and pushing for both men and women to collaborate in its construction. The proposal put forward is to engage in policy reforms and cultural change in view of achieving an equal redistribution of the rights and responsibilities associated with social reproduction. The main argument is that only then will progress have been made in terms of equal levels of emancipation for men and women. It is also suggested that policymakers should refrain from assuming women to be altruistic providers of care in public spaces and quintessential providers of care in private ones.<sup>47</sup> All the experiences converge to reject a purely economic approach to the issue of care, stressing the need to improve existing theoretical models by including an ethic of care in economic thinking. In this sense, they echo the proposal put forward by feminist economists such as Diane Elson: social reproduction can no longer be the missing element of economic policymaking. Rethinking social reproduction within economics can be done through three axes: recognition, reduction and redistribution to men and women equally (2010).

Generally speaking, the articles confirm the feminist critique that social and cultural aspects are inextricable from the economic models at work in a given context. They argue that the divide between the social, the economic, the ethical and the ecological is ideological. Moreover, it has contributed to allowing human rights abuses by multinational enterprises to go unpunished.

At the level of social movements in Latin America, the proposals put forward in these eight experiences are in line with those being currently developed by several social movements. In this specific sense, the following elements are useful tools to move forward in the construction of just and sustainable economic and development paradigms, WIDE believes that these elements can also be successfully taken to the policy level, in particular, if the goal is to enhance the ownership of development interventions by governments, international institutions and development agencies:

## **2.2. Transforming from below: solidarity economy from the perspective of grassroots women**

The articles give an account of women's struggle to improve their livelihoods through economic activities in rural and urban spaces. They also show that women's thinking and acting does not end there. Ideas and actions are part of a long-term project that is decisively political: the goal is to transform the economy so that it mirrors women's daily reality as well as the broader social context in which they are fighting and proposing alternatives. All the cases presented bear a concern with redistributive justice, both at the level of production and social reproduction. Based upon this evidence, one can notice that women's overarching goal is social transformation at two levels: in the short and long term. In the short term their goal is to be recognised as knowledgeable economic agents in markets. In the longer term, they seek to redress the policies and practices that subordinate them in the labour market, discriminate against them in the process of wealth/resource distribution, deny them access to knowledge and technologies, and burden them as solely responsible for social reproduction.

The transformative potential of these experiences lies in their capacity to generate and reproduce a culture of collaboration and sustainability in a social context dominated by competitiveness, individualism and consumerism. Their activities foster a climate of social well-being that is key to prevent and resolve social conflicts in local contexts. Indeed, these case studies demonstrate that at the local level there are viable alternatives to the conflict-driven neoliberal economic model, and women play a crucial role in transforming social conflict into opportunities for gender and social justice. The models these women are implementing value women's leadership in local production, promote hybrid modes of trading goods/produce, foster socio-productive models that promote cooperativism and production for local markets. These are all strategic options that ensure food security for many households in the region and which are strengthening the capacity of small-scale producers and entrepreneurs to counteract the multiple crises affecting their livelihoods. This sustained wish to collaborate nationally and transnationally towards the construction of just and sustainable production models and resilient food systems calls for further support from governments and donor agencies.

## **2.3. Food sovereignty from a women's rights perspective**

The case studies also propose some useful insights to rethink the current agricultural model from the lens of food sovereignty. In Latin America a large majority of

governments have been unable to develop a truly sustainable agricultural model, let alone one that is based on national development priorities. The Latin American agricultural sector has been negatively affected by export-led agribusiness and monoculture, water and mining megaprojects. These are structural threats to women's livelihoods, for they impinge on their power to access and control productive assets and resources. In this sense, the articles present empirically based evidence which bears great political significance: it demonstrates women's awareness of the increasing levels of power, the current development model is bestowing upon multinational companies and national economic elites, and the levels of food insecurity and environmental damage that it is generating. The proposals highlight women's roles as key interlocutors in sustainable agriculture, as key agents of sustainable food chains, and as key managers of biodiversity. They also highlight women's knowledge in alternative patterns of accumulation, the most prominent being the promotion of a socio-economic development model based upon the sustained renewal and regeneration of our limited natural resources.

In the domain of capabilities and rights, the studies provide good practices of economic and productive projects inspired by redistributive justice. The different modalities proposed converge around one important tenet: women's rights to produce and trade in accordance with their own priorities and contextual realities. A fundamental issue here is their resolve to engage in economic activities enshrined in an idea of development with dignity and solidarity. This emerges as a cornerstone in grassroots women's vision of food sovereignty and economic empowerment. From a human rights standpoint, they also stress the need to lobby governments so that they comply with commitments made in the framework of women's social, cultural and economic rights (CEDAW and Beijing) and with conventions protecting the rights of indigenous and Afro-descendent women as people.

#### **2.4. Towards an economy of *Buen Vivir***

Overtly or tacitly, the articles situate women's experiences with solidarity economy in a conceptual and value frame that recalls the paradigm of *Buen Vivir*. Indeed, women promote an idea of economic development which is inseparable from value structures that are beneficial for society as a whole: as the Venezuelan authors put it, the idea is to put economics and the economy at the service of "the highest possible sum of happiness for everyone". This concern with promoting 'do-good policies' instead of 'harmful policies' is reflected in the interconnectedness between the social, the economic, the cultural and the environmental. In other words, economic activity (trade and financial speculation, among others) affects nature, and vice-

versa. In this way, they redefine the economy as a human exercise affected by power relations and where the struggle to acknowledge and respect the limited nature of our planet's resources is central. Here again, they follow the anti-systemic critique engrained in *Buen Vivir*: economic activities, agricultural production, food chains and any business activity involving an effect on nature must be consistent with the idea that nature's resources are finite and must be protected.

As the experiences of Ecuador and Guatemala show, *Buen Vivir* offers the possibility of addressing macroeconomics from a geopolitical standpoint. A main argument here is that colonial legacies live on the current neoliberal model: they are engrained in the mindset of business, economic and political decision-makers. Furthermore, they are reflected in their policies and practices as evidenced in the behaviour of multinational and multilatin companies and in the inability of governments to stop processes of economic liberalisation that violate the human rights of women. This is a crucial issue for many women, in particular for indigenous, Afro-descendent, lesbian women and women affected by HIV and AIDS.

Along with issues pertaining to global governance, the proposals relating to an economy for *Buen Vivir* advocate alternatives that incorporate a critical reading of the legacy of racism, social exploitation and environmental degradation left by colonial powers. The final message is that there are alternatives to the logics of capitalist expansion, and one of them is an ethic of care for human life and nature. Ensuring the well-being of both is the responsibility of men and women.<sup>48</sup>

## **2.5. Beyond gender: the intersectionality of power in women's structural subordination**

The experiences presented make a compelling case for intersectional analysis of women's empowerment and agency in Latin America. They emphasise the complex heterogeneity of women informing the reality of local development. They also suggest that we should rethink the manifold discriminations affecting women (for example, in the labour market, in the agricultural and financial sectors) through more than one variable of inequality. Concretely, they provide insights into how we can enrich gender analysis by incorporating intersecting variables such as race/ethnicity, social class, age and gender.

Even though the intersectionality of power affecting women's socioeconomic agency is not explored in depth, we believe that intersectional analysis offers a potential for innovative thinking on alternatives to the dominant neoliberal economic model.



In the experiences presented, intersectional analysis exposes the pitfalls of orthodox economic analysis. In particular, it strengthens the critique of the multiple hegemonies at work in the neoliberal economic model: class, patriarchal and racial hegemonies collaborate under a common banner. The common banner is profit maximisation at the lowest cost possible and regardless of its human consequences. The case studies suggest that these overlapping hegemonies affect women in different ways. For instance, because of their constructed inferiority, black and indigenous women pay a heavy price. Clearly, grassroots women's grounded interpretation of the intersections of power affecting the economy permits a more complex reading of women's trajectories towards empowerment and agency.

From this angle, the experiences suggest that economic analysis and development models that do not include a concern with intersectional gender justice are doomed to be flawed. The major risk would be to privilege women of a specific social group in detriment of others who are less visible or socially constructed as doubly or triply inferior.

## **2.6. Decolonising and 'depatriarchalising' the nation-state and the cultural mindset of Latin America**

The studies reposition the key role of the State as regulator of the economy and as the one that must ensure the equal distribution of wealth and resources. Parallel to this, they propose to decolonise and 'depatriarchalise'<sup>49</sup> society and the State. This is an important political project in many countries, and it is women who have led the struggle. Their goal is highly ambitious and tactical: they want to put an end to gender blindness, racism and the heteronormative, patriarchal culture that shapes policymaking. The articles show how women are confronted with a patriarchal culture in public and private spaces. In particular, they show how indigenous and black women are particularly vulnerable to it: on the one hand, they must fight machismo within their own communities; on the other, they must contend with the structural racism affecting their communities and society at large. The message is loud and clear: the stories emphasise the correlation of the cultural, the social and the economic. The key issue is that the labour market continues to be segmented because of a hegemonic world-vision that is colonialist and patriarchal. In this hegemonic world-vision, women's subordinated status is perpetuated by one of capitalism's most powerful weapons: namely, the current model of macroeconomic growth.

## 2.7. Towards a new pattern of accumulation

At the macropolitical level, the proposals compel us to rethink the current pattern of capital accumulation in the light of the current interlocking crises (food, climate, financial and labour). The issues raised situate the debate on economic alternatives in the framework of broad and intertwined social aspirations: social, gender and environmental justice (nature's rights). They also show that alternatives for sustainable economic development are burgeoning in local spaces and that they deserve serious consideration by national and international policymakers.

Importantly, they provide us with innovative thinking on patterns of accumulation that debunk the logics of neoliberal capital accumulation. The grounded knowledges of Latin American grassroots women stem from a shared vision of well-being whose defining elements are: a new approach to the relationship between capital and labour, a rethinking of the economy based on an ethic of cares (care of human life and care of nature), and value-based economic models of *Buen Vivir* in local and global spaces. To governments, women recommend working towards the consolidation of a long-term development model based on a new pattern of production and accumulation. This model must reflect national priorities and break with the logic of agribusiness-led monoculture and unfettered extractivism. Both are threatening the daily existence of women, their families, their communities. They also call upon governments to design and implement (macro- and micro-) economic policies in line with this new model. Some policy recommendations pointing in this direction include:

- investment in non-industrial food production to strengthen local economies;
- implementation of legislation to ensure access to and control of land and productive assets for men and women on an equal basis;
- policies which incorporate women's knowledge on sustainable agriculture (diversification strategies, management of seeds and food reserves), ecological entrepreneurship and preservation of biodiversity<sup>50</sup>
- design and implement economic models that respect the human rights of women workers, reduce the historic dependency of Latin American economies, and reject speculation on natural resources.
- ensure that these models will not exacerbate economic, social, cultural, sexual and reproductive violence against women.

## 2.8. Closing remarks

Like other alternatives reflecting the complexity of Latin American social reality, those put forward in the eight studies below are not free from dilemmas. All experiences raise the issue (without resolving it) of how to value women's contribution to the care economy away from the monetary logic driving the current neoliberal economic model. The cases of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia raise the important question of how to incorporate, with justice and equity, women workers of the informal economy in a labour market that is segmented due to gender and racial prejudice and which is structurally disadvantageous to women in general. The experience of Venezuela raises two major questions: can an alternative model of microfinance really exist outside global capitalism? And, how can we negotiate the tension between a State's efforts to empower excluded women and its participation in speculative global financial markets, oil markets in particular? The experience from Bolivia leaves us with the question of how to preserve a national culture of healthy food consumption at a time when global food trends tend to homogenise our eating cultures. Echoing the women from Argentina, the Guatemalan experience poses two major questions: How come that so many people in countries with sufficient resources are enduring food insecurity and hunger? And, how can national governments develop economic models which promote food sovereignty, social justice and the rights of nature in a global context of unfettered trade and financial speculation? Finally, the experiences from Ecuador and Mexico demonstrate the importance of ecological models of entrepreneurship in the tourism sector. At the same time, they leave us with the question of how resilient these innovative micro-models can be when the mainstream tourism industry views environmental protection as unprofitable. The Colombian case study raises the issue of how to construct strategic alliances with trade unions in countries where unionism not only has been demonised but is also affected by a patriarchal bias against women workers.

Throughout the eight case studies, grassroots women insist on the necessity to advance in the construction of holistic models which consider their economic, social, cultural, sexual and reproductive rights. However, in a majority of cases, there is a big gap between women's struggles and the policies and practices of their respective governments. Regrettably, the latter continue to privilege the interests of national elites and transnational companies over the development priorities of their own citizens.

As we can see, the challenges are great. But so is women's power to reinvent themselves and move forward towards gender and social justice. The case studies show that, from their own contexts, they are consistently working to build viable alternatives to the impediments generated by a global systemic crisis of unprecedented dimensions.

Along with presenting the voices, visions and knowledges of grassroots women, the case studies also raise important challenges to economic analysis in general, and feminist economic thinking in particular. A first challenge, which we put forward as a proposal, is to pursue work on interpretative frameworks that bring the experiential knowledges of grassroots women to the forefront of mainstream economic theory. Second, considering the many structures of oppressions affecting women, analysis should move beyond gender-based discrimination to include intersectionality. The narratives of empowerment presented below show that even though gender continues to be a primary vector of oppression, it is not enough to fully explain the discriminatory nature of Latin American economies and institutions. The key issue is to design analytical frameworks which address women's invisibility in the economy and sectoral policies (such as agriculture, mining and energy) from the intertwining of gender, class and racial discrimination.

The case studies corroborate the fact that a new wave of constructive social power is burgeoning in Latin America. Social movements, along with committed individual thinkers and activists, are deconstructing and redefining mainstream economics and consistently struggling for an alternative socioeconomic paradigm. Grassroots women, in alliance with feminist academics and activists, are playing a key role in this process of constructive transformation. WIDE believes that the good practices and proposals presented below can energise global debates on alternatives to the mainstream economic model and enhance the political relevance of development and economic policymaking. In this sense, we can take several key lessons from these case studies. First, they debunk theories claiming a supposed antagonism between economic development and equality-driven social policy. Second, they provide valuable insights to move forward in the construction of long-term development paradigms based upon people's rights rather than on profit-maximisation and macro-economic efficiency.

As this publication shows, WIDE's main goal is to bring forward women's efforts to construct alternatives to the dominant neoliberal model at the macro and micro level and in their interrelationship. Starting from their own insights and lived experience of oppression, women are working hard to eradicate the historic inequity and inequalities rooted in Latin American societies and economies. At the same time, they are working towards the mindset-shifting required to ensure a culture of inclusive socioeconomic well-being, gender justice and environmental justice.

Finally, through this publication, WIDE hopes to contribute to the promotion of feminist alternatives which enhance the achievement of women's cultural, social and economic rights. We also want to strengthen transnational feminist dialogues on economic alternatives to the dominant neoliberal model. We hope that this publication becomes a stepping stone on both paths.

## NOTES:

- 1 *Transl. From Spanish: « En las luchas de resistencia nos encontramos, y nos vamos reconociendo. No sólo en los dolores y en las rabias. También en las esperanzas » “Socialismo y feminismo en el horizonte estratégico de las luchas populares Claudia Korol”. Contribución a la Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo. Online article available at [www.anamuri.cl](http://www.anamuri.cl)*
- 2 *Here we follow the plural form used by Latin American grassroots women leaders and feminists: i.e. saberes = knowledges. Through saberes, women emphasise the collective nature of transformative knowledges, their power to travel through time and geographical locations, and their unfinished nature. This redefinition echoes deconstructive efforts by feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway who have referred to “situated knowledges” to emphasise the value of different forms of knowledge claims (1988:6).*
- 3 *The ‘Economic Alternatives for Gender, Social Justice and Sustainable Development: Women’s Voices from Latin America’ workshop was part of a bigger event organised in Madrid parallel to the meeting of Heads of State of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean (14–18 May 2010). The big event (the People’s Summit) was jointly organised by a civil society initiative called ‘the bi-regional network Europe–Latin America and Caribbean’ and the ‘Campaign against the Europe of Capital, War and Crisis, for the Solidarity among the People’.*
- 4 *Egan (2003); Katz (2010); Gallagher (2008; 2011).*
- 5 *Katz (2010).*
- 6 *Velásquez (2010: 5). Palley defines it as “a process whereby financial markets, financial institutions and financial elites gain greater influence over economic policy and economic outcomes. Financialisation transforms the functioning of the economic system at both the macro and micro levels” (2007).*
- 7 *Acosta contends that in Ecuador there is a contradiction between the government’s discourse and practice. In theory, the official discourse promotes a sovereign economic model that respects the rights of people and of Nature. In practice, the government has not moved away from the “extractivist logic” which is “predatory” in terms of human rights and the environment. This contradiction is illustrated by the government’s intentions to open zones protected for their biodiversity to the extractive industry (Acosta, 2010). Ruiz Marrero suggests that this trend has also expanded to the rest of the continent when he argues that Colombia has recently opened up its mineral resources to foreign direct investors (2011).*
- 8 *This is a new term which refers to Latin American investment consortia which are competing with global investors (such as China and Japan) on large-scale land acquisition (land-grabbing), mostly for monoculture (soya beans for biofuel, eucalyptus etc.).*
- 9 *Egan (2003).*
- 10 *In Latin America the interlocking global crises of the past three years have accentuated the historical dependency of the economies of the region. Central America has been particularly affected. In this sub-region, the package of macroeconomic measures adopted as part of the austerity plans have ignored the context in which these crises have occurred (debt crisis, impact of structural adjustment policies on national development agendas, armed conflict, massive displacement, violence and dispossession). Many analysts have criticised governments for their incapacity to design models of socioeconomic development that reflect*

- national priorities and enforce the human rights of men and women workers. (Valenzuela Feijoo, s/f; Robinson, 2003; Aguilar, 2007).*
- 11 *This is demonstrated by recent agreements to purchase large expanses of land for export-led monoculture (c.f. Gallagher, 2011; Grain, 2010).*
  - 12 *There is abundant empirical evidence showing the correlation between land-grabbing and social conflict. However, few studies explore the linkages between investment policies, land-grabbing and increases in economic and sexual violence against rural women. The growing wave of social conflict and violence against women generated by 'land grabs' calls for a critical analysis of the current policies and practices of national governments, multinational enterprises and international institutions. The World Rain Forest Movement (WRFM), a global network, is amongst the few civil society organisations who is documenting the impact of land-grabbing (for monoculture of eucalyptus and palm oil) on indigenous and black rural women in Latin America and Africa. See their website [www.wrfm.org](http://www.wrfm.org).*
  - 13 *WRFM, Women and Eucalyptus: Stories of Life and Resistance (2010)*
  - 14 *C.f. Valdés Gutiérrez (2009).*
  - 15 *<http://www.articulacaodemulheres.org.br>.*
  - 16 *Acosta (2011).*
  - 17 *C.f. de la Fuente Lavín et al. (2008).*
  - 18 *See, for instance, Chancosa (2010); Pérez Gómez (2010); Seoane et al. (2010); Gudynas (2011); Ramírez (2010). As indigenous women leaders from Bolivia and Ecuador told the author of this article, Buen Vivir (Ecuador) and Vivir Bien (Bolivia) are synonymous. "Buen Vivir is a Spanish translation of the Quechua concept of Sumak Kawsay"*
  - 19 *There are interesting parallels between Buen Vivir and proposals for growth-less prosperity such as the one put forward by Tim Jackson. According to Jackson, the current economic paradigm has reached the limits of its own material and environmental growth, but we continue to live as if nothing had happened. Jackson contends that we are living in an era of global "ir-responsibility" characterised by "long-term blindness to the limitations of the material world. This blindness is as evident in our ability to regulate financial markets as it is in our ability to protect natural resources and curtail ecological damage" (2009: 32).*
  - 20 *Mejías Flores (2010).*
  - 21 *More than 500 experts took part in this important event. Videos and presentations are available at <http://decrecimientoybuenvivir.wordpress.com>.*
  - 22 *This means that macroeconomic policies interact with institutions and the microeconomic level: households, community, labour markets, the couple (as affected by unequal power relations). This has been called a two-way relationship or the macro-meso-micro nexus (Azar et al., 2009; van Staveren, 2010; Elson, 2009).*
  - 23 *Irene León uses this term to refer to a number of male political decision-makers who have accumulated power within international financial institutions. These subjects exert hegemonic power and are ethnically defined as white, socioeconomically defined as rich, and culturally defined as heterosexual. Their degree of empowerment is reinforced by an elitist technocratic ideology (2005:13).*
  - 24 *Lagarde (2005); Monárrez Fragoso (2002); Muñoz Cabrera (2011).*

- 25 *Monárrez Fragoso compellingly demonstrates the interrelationship between export-led economic development and femicides of women factory workers in Ciudad de Juárez, Mexico (2002).*
- 26 *Espino (2007); Azar et al. (2009).*
- 27 *Azar et al. (2009); Sanchís s/f; Farías & Nobre (2002).*
- 28 *Guillén ctd & Quintela (2006).*
- 29 *Almeida (2002).*
- 30 *Elson (2009); Elson (2010).*
- 31 *Carrasco (1999); Quintela (2006); Palacios & Guevara (2011).*
- 32 *See, for instance, the works of Afro-Brazilian philosopher Sueli Carneiro, the afro-descendent women of MOMUME in Ecuador, and the Quilombola women in Brazil, who are working with the WRFM on community-based research. The aim is to document the impact of land-grabbing on indigenous and Afro-Brazilian rural women (c.f. Mujeres y Eucaliptus op. cit.).*
- 33 *In Ecuador, feminist and women's groups refer to the "economy of cares" (economía de los cuidados). This redefinition aims to mainstream into economic thinking the caring for nature and the caring for human beings (Letter sent by the women of Mesa de derechos económicos de las mujeres to President Enrique Correa, Quito, 29 April 2011).*
- 34 *Chancosa (2010); Tauli-Corpuz (2005).*
- 35 *www.movimientos.org/remte.*
- 36 *Leon, (2010).*
- 37 *Fariás & Norbre (2002).*
- 38 *Sanchís (2004).*
- 39 *Quintela (2006).*
- 40 *Quintela (2006).*
- 41 *Sanchís (2004).*
- 42 *Azar et al. refer to these variables in passing when they argue that "gender is an analytical category of great usefulness when attempting to explain the inequalities affecting people, but it is only part of a complex social construction relating to identity, hierarchy and difference. Race, ethnicity, class and sexuality are other socially constructed categories that intersect with gender to determine the social location of individuals" (2009: 2).*
- 43 *Matthaei (2002). Importantly, intersectional analysis can also be useful to problematise the tensions arising within social groups who experience multiple discriminations in a given society, as is the case of many black and indigenous migrant women in Latin America and Europe.*
- 44 *See, for instance, the commitments made by governments in the context of the International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Special Report of the UN Rapporteur for the Right to Food and Water (2002) and the commitments made during the World Conference on Women (1975).*
- 45 *Association of Kichwa women of Shiripuno, Ecuador.*

- 46 *An evidence-based study by SOMO (a Dutch research and lobbying organisation monitoring corporate behaviour globally) reports that in the mining sector, women are usually not hired by mining companies directly but work as artisanal miners or prostitutes, or other jobs which are precarious and make them vulnerable to violence: "they regularly have to care for the men working in the mines in the polluted and impoverished mining environment." (2009: 2).*
- 47 *This issue has been raised by feminist scholars such as Irma Arriagada (2006) and Maxime Molyneux (2007).*
- 48 *As suggested also by Gudynas (2011: 2) and Ramírez (2010: 139).*
- 49 *Neologism used by Latin American feminists: despatriarcalizar, meaning to eradicate patriarchy from social, economic and political systems.*
- 50 *Donato et al. (2007) have made some useful proposals in this direction.*



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SECTION II

**3. VOICES AND VISIONS  
FROM LATIN AMERICA**

Original articles available in the Spanish version

### **3.1. The geopolitics of food and water in Guatemala: scarcity in a country with abundance and concrete actions to improve the situation from the perspective of women's organisations**

*Original article by Norma Maldonado y Anaité Roulet*

#### **ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES**

The article illustrates two experiences of rural development connected to the universal rights to food and to access to water. Food and water, two basic needs for life, hardly satisfied in Guatemala, highlight the role of economic policies at the local level and how women look for sustainable and effective solutions when access to these resources is limited or denied.

##### **3.1.1. The right to food: ADEMI's experience**

The Ixpiyakok women's organisation was created by a group of widows of the internal armed conflict and financed by a scholarship fund for the training of traditional midwives linked to the official health system and for raising awareness of good nutrition and local production of food. ADEMI women managed to negotiate from their families small plots of land to cultivate their gardens to guarantee fresh, healthy and cheap food. The women consider it a political choice that, from a cultural point of view, protects their way of producing and living. Despite being allowed to cultivate their gardens, they felt the need to create a space to discuss issues such as food sovereignty within the family, communities and local governments. Meetings have been organised with each stakeholder, at which ADEMI women themselves explained their proposals on food sovereignty. These meetings have been raising interest in all community and local authorities represented by men and have provoked some changes in families' production systems. Following the great results of women's agro-ecological techniques, men involved in export production have asked for the organic fertilisers and pesticides used by women on their gardens.

##### **3.1.2. The right to water: SEFCA practice**

SEFCA is a women's and men's organisation created in the refugee camps in Chiapas, Mexico, during the 1980s. It is widely recognised in the communities, especially in the Mayan territory of Q'eqchi in the northern part of Guatemala. SEFCA created a Political School for Women managed by young women of the community of San Pedro Carchà and aimed to train women to influence the Community Councils

of Urban and Rural Cooperation (COCODES) aimed at promoting citizens' participation at all levels.

Parallel to the trainings, SEFCA started to build cisterns to collect rainwater at household level. To date, 500 cisterns have been built in five communities using bioconstruction techniques and employing local women and men.

### **PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?**

The patient work of the indigenous people, in particular of indigenous women, allowed many of the local plants to be managed and saved, converting them into food. The families managed to produce most of their nourishment by milpa, a system of agricultural techniques used by the indigenous people which associates the cultivation of local corn to beans with the same characteristics and to several varieties of pumpkins, food herbs and medicinal plants. Mayan women have been cultivating medicinal plants, vegetables, fruit, aromatic and food herbs in their patios for hundreds of years, and they know how to collect all the nourishment needed. Despite all this precious knowledge, 49.3% of children below five years old suffer from chronic malnutrition; of those, 69.5% of indigenous children suffer from malnutrition.

In the last 20 years, government policies have been promoting the conversion from the milpa system to the more profitable cultivation of vegetables with new technologies that have caused soil and water depletion and pollution. In the last 10 years, after the ratification of a free trade agreement that reinforces the role of Guatemala as a producer of vegetables for export, many producers, motivated by the high profitability of cultivating vegetables, have stopped growing corn and beans, basic food for their diet, and entirely devoted their cultivation to the production of vegetables for export. Vegetables exported do not always comply with European national standards and do not constitute a basic foodstuff. Indigenous people, especially indigenous women, have been heavily affected by this change and had to look for alternatives to provide the nourishment needed by their families. It is in this context that ADEMI was born.

Regarding the right to water, neoliberal policies implemented by the International Monetary Fund in cooperation with the Central American region in the 1990s affected people's access to water. The worst affected were women, who are directly involved in the use and management of scarce water. San Pedro Carchà is a region rich in water: it rains nine to 10 months a year. There is a tropical forest that provides wood, and coffee and cardamom are cultivated. On the wave of structural adjustments and privatisations, governments sold the rivers to private firms. Even if some of the local communities, after years of fight, have won their lands back, they have

no more water. As a consequence of that, Q'eqchies women walk for four hours a day to collect two and a half litres of water. Paradoxically, they walk along the river, but they cannot get water from it. The only way to reach water is to literally get into the ground, to a depth of seven metres, risking their lives and their daughters'. Women sent many petitions to the local authorities, but their protests and needs remained ignored. It is in this context that SEFCA was born.

## CHALLENGES AND CONCLUSIONS

Since 2007, ADEMI and SEFCA have participated in the Defence Network for Food Security in Guatemala to share their experiences. The situation of women in Guatemala is complex. Despite being confined to precarious domestic work in the family and being denied taking part in decision-making on issues they are directly involved in, such as food and water, they look to their ancestral and cultural roots to find alternative solutions to the problems. ADEMI women grow their own food, according to their diet and agro-ecological techniques, ensuring good health for them, their community and Mother Earth. Q'eqchies women supported by SEFCA take on the task of the local management of water by using rainwater – a natural holy phenomenon in their culture – building themselves cisterns that respect the environmental context. However, the progress of SEFCA and ADEMI women is an exception. The Red Nacional por la Defensa de la Soberanía Alimentaria en Guatemala (RedSAG – National Network for the Defence of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala) was formed by about 200 grassroots organisations and aims to develop proposals and activities in defence of food sovereignty. Some spaces for the participation of women have been opening up in

RedSAG, but women are still a minority and not all the members of the network support gender equality and keep excluding women from the movement, justifying this attitude as traditional and based on family values.

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## 3.2. Reclaiming rights: women in the family agricultural markets in Argentina speak up

*Original article by Mercedes Caracciolo Basco*

### ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICE

This experience demonstrates the struggle of rural women to preserve a tradition of 'family agricultural markets' inspired by food sovereignty and solidarity economy.

Family agricultural markets were created to be held once or twice a week and were not subject to municipal taxation. They represented an economic alternative for the workers excluded from the capitalist sectors after the huge economic crisis in Argentina in 2000/2001 and also an opportunity for people to consume healthy and fresh products. These markets involve 4500 families and 34,000 consumers.

Other elements of the family food markets which show their adherence to principles of solidarity economy are:

- they promote family agriculture, and the production chain is controlled by 'family production units';
- members are organised as non-profit associations;
- there are no intermediaries, the relationship between producer and consumer is direct, and the prices are fair;
- they promote agroecology and protection of the environment;
- they prioritise production for local consumption;
- they strengthen the social fabric of the community; and
- leaders use their bargaining power in their relations with local authorities.

### PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

The application and consequent implementation of neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s and the massive growth in cultivation for export led to significant asymmetries in agricultural production, especially disadvantaging small Latin American producers.

In the case of Argentina, the fall in the price of industrial agricultural products (tobacco, tung, tea) historically grown by families brought the small producers in the area of Misiones to increase their production to cultivate products for self-consump-

tion. In other words, some of the products that had been exported before had to be reallocated to serve the local markets.

The garden and agricultural products traditionally grown by women did not have an economic value until the family agricultural markets started and became one of the most important mean of subsistence for small farmers. They also promote women's participation: 80% of those who are trading during market hours are women.

Marketing promotes dialogue, negotiation and intersubjectivity. Women started to receive remuneration for the work they were doing and to manage and earn money weekly following the creation of the family agricultural markets.

### **ANALYSIS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

Women's participation in economic life has been enhanced by these markets. Also, women have come together in organisations called 'intermarket associations' which coordinate the markets in all municipalities, with delegates for each market.

The markets favoured changes in gender relations among young men and women, specifically in terms of the sexual division of labour in the household, violence against women, and sexual and reproductive health. As a consequence of these changes, the first tangible result is greater respect for women's rights in a context of widespread gender-based violence. A change in the gendered division of labour in families, linked to care work, is also visible and has allowed women to become more involved in the markets. Women have gained a place in the labour market and have made an economic alternative to capitalism possible, but the process is still at a very early stage.

However, when marketing for the product is favoured or there are no alternative ways of cultivation, men systematically displace women. Women producers and traders continue to be subordinated, relegating them to a secondary economic role or simply to the domestic space. So the participation of women in the markets does not solve gender inequalities. In fact, it is true that these markets belong to a social economy, but they cannot be considered solidarity markets, as they do not ensure gender equality. Greater involvement from Argentinean local authorities is needed, so that these food markets are supported by adequate public policies to establish a real economic alternative to the capitalist system.

## CONCLUSIONS

The markets have enhanced the potential of local markets and started the process of women's empowerment. In this case, the capacity and technical support of the local government aimed to meet women's strategic needs from a gender perspective. Those needs are difficult to meet when promoting entrepreneurship of isolated women and considering the power relations and subordination affecting women.

The family agricultural markets have the potential to integrate an alternative economy – different from the patriarchal capitalism – if they are supported by public policies, as happened in this case. From the experience gained a set of best practices can be detected for establishing and operating Social Solidarity Economy Markets in coordination with social organisations and local governments wishing to promote more egalitarian and sustainable social relations for women, men and the environment.

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### 3.3. In Shiripuno, Ecuador, hope has a woman's face

*Original article by Paulina Muñoz Samaniego*

#### ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICE

The Kichwa community of Shiripuno, made up of 151 people, lives in the middle of the Ecuadorian Amazon forest, a few hours from Quito, the capital city. In 2005, the 22 women of the community started an organisation called AMUKISHMI (Kichwas Women's Association of Schiripo-Misahuali) to improve their conditions and those of their families by promoting an economic and cultural alternative based on community tourism related to the defence of the environment and to the rehabilitation of their rights.

The ecotourism project is self-supported and works without any institutional funding. Nevertheless, women can count on public and private collaboration of those stakeholders interested in promoting and encourage tourism in the area.

The project has four different aspects:

- the cultural objective aimed at promoting and preserving the Kichwa culture in the region, rescuing and valorising the daily habits of the community in danger of extinction from contact with western/urban civilisation and modern media;
- the ecological perspective that is able to show how indigenous people's community life is respectful and in harmony with nature and the environment;
- the economic purpose of creating employment and income to improve the living conditions of the community's families; and
- respecting the human perspective within intercultural tourism, aimed at integrating the visitor in the productive and cultural life of the community.

#### PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

The eastern region of Ecuador has been at the centre of territorial disputes with its neighbouring country, Peru, and affected by internal and external conflicts because of its mineral richness and its biodiversity.

Since 1942, the governmental policies implemented systematically abandoned the needs of the ancestral indigenous people that live in the region. In fact, the interests in penetrating the forest and exploiting mineral and oil resources were stronger

than the defence of the life of indigenous communities and their environment. The intense activity of oil companies contaminated lands and rivers and influenced workers' behavioural patterns such as abandoning wives and children, and violence.

The situation of women was heavily affected by the presence of transnational oil companies. Access to waged labour changed men's habits, such as increasing alcohol consumption that accentuated violence against women. The division of labour in the community was harmed, and women more and more often became objects of discrimination, put in a situation of vulnerability and exclusion.

## CONCLUSIONS

The success of this project is mainly due to the women's organisation and the valorisation of the indigenous women's culture based on the principles of solidarity and equity. The concrete innovation that can be found in this alternative economy is the active participation of women and the important role they have reclaimed in their community. Also, their subsequent self-confidence and empowerment have been improving their quality of life:

This project is an example of the evidence that another world is possible and that poor, urban, peasant and indigenous women of Latin America are contributing to shape new visions and alternatives to capitalism.

These kinds of projects are possible on the basis of a consensus in the decision-making, not only because an agreement has to be found, but also because the agreement is made on the basis of a balanced dialogue. It regains the identity and the deepest values of the ancestors, the Sumak Kawsay synonymous with full life, *vida buena*, *Buen Vivir* (good life), in loving harmony with the Pachamama (mother earth) and all living things.

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### 3.4. An alternative entrepreneurship model: the ecotourism project led by Puebla indigenous women in Mexico

*Original article by Lourdes del Carmen Angulo Salazar*

#### ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICE

This is an experience of rural development from an ethno-feminist perspective: it aims at reverting and overcoming the stereotypes of gender and ethnicity through practices that focus on the equitable participation of indigenous women, their right to a life without violence, their access to common resources, the subsequent distribution of these resources on an equitable basis through inclusive processes, and the interest in fighting for them, sharing these struggles with other indigenous women across the country.

The hotel Taselotzin (meaning ‘fruit of the land’) and the small shops around it are totally managed by women, giving employment to 20 of them. The project includes a focus on activities of reforestation of the area, eco-tourist walks, a rain-water harvesting system and the manufacture of compost based on waste recycling. The organisation Maseualsuamej Mosenyolchikauanij (‘Indigenous Women Working Together’) not only owns the hotel, but is even the owner of a shop for natural health products, a greenhouse where medicinal plants are grown, a handicraft shop and workshops where women produce recycled paper and biodegradable cleaning products. At the same time, the organisation includes some activities to diversify the means for supporting women’s and their families’ livelihoods. The organisation promotes projects managed and controlled by women.

#### PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

The hotel Taselotzin started its activities in 1997 thanks to the work of 47 women nahuas who are part of the organisation Maseualsuamej Mosenyolchikauanij, which works to improve their living conditions and their position in society.

Once the women’s organisation had been created, it initiated work from a gender perspective, including organisational and training activities aimed at improving the knowledge and ownership of the rights of indigenous women, training and promotion of reproductive health rights and the organisation of regional meetings.

The women in the organisation that created the project had already had a similar

experience, being part of a previous organisation and cooperative. The indigenous women felt it necessary to create an independent organisation because of the need to generate new income for the women of the local communities. The objective was to reinstate the cultural and economic value of the handicrafts produced by those women and the products managed by the cooperative, such as coffee and peppers.

The external support received was a constant element which characterised the whole process: the institutional support, the technical team that offered capacity and advice, feminist groups, and collaboration with other non-governmental organisations. That kind of cooperation facilitated the participation of indigenous women in national and regional spaces.

Grupo de Educación Popular con Mujeres (GEM – ‘Grassroots Education with Women’) strongly supported the project by offering technical capacity, information and useful knowledge to reflect on and transform the oppressive situation in which women live. Through its work it has facilitated the participation of indigenous women in national and regional spaces, allowing them to get in touch with other organisations and coordinate themselves in a network called the Network of Indigenous Women for the Defence of Our Rights, whose activities are aimed at the protection of indigenous rights and the prevention of gender-based violence.

Management of the hotel has been carried out by indigenous women together with the support of advisers who proposed the project to different governmental organisations. The project was financed by the Indigenous National Institute and the National Fund for Social Enterprises.

## **ANALYSIS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

This experience marks a new process of coordination between indigenous women that gave rise to women’s leadership and strengthened the collective identity of the organisation Maseualsujamej Mosenyolchikauanij and the relationships between the local groups and the regional representation.

The experience led to many achievements; indigenous women had the opportunity to strengthen their skills through capacity-building aimed at identifying their needs and building economic alternatives. Also, the necessary attention was paid to the fact that income-generating activities would not increase women’s workloads.

The project reevaluates women’s productive practices, especially their craftsman-

ship, and operates with environmental criteria. In fact, some of the economic benefits generated by the hotel are set aside for new activities promoting environmental protection.

Furthermore, a fundamental element is the commitment of the team of advisers who are allies of indigenous women and are following the project and willing to share and acquire knowledge. This knowledge is continuously reshaped by the present social experiences and grows with the new challenges and questions raised by the context of practice.

Despite all these positive elements, the organisation had to confront various challenges including the conflicts arising with the neighbourhood that did not welcome the fact that some women were building a hotel. The neighbours hampered the works for the hotel, and the women had to buy other land.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this context, the social changes promoted are shown by the combination of small and daily achievements from small local projects to the huge project of the eco-tourist hotel. A social organisation supports the project; that means that different forms of organised participation are present at the local level and are reflected in the regional representation.

Furthermore, the indigenous knowledge of care for the environment together with the use of traditional medicine and professional knowledge are able to preserve and give a new value to the indigenous knowledge, culminating in the economic project they have initiated, the eco-tourist hotel.

Another fruitful element of the experience is the creation and configuration of those networks able to generate and mobilise strategic resources related to the needs, interests and projects of indigenous women. Nevertheless, the challenges confronted highlight the elements of machismo and racism strongly rooted in local society that discriminate against indigenous women.

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### 3.5. Promoting alternative economies in Colombia

*Original article by Alba Lucia Castañeda Velez*

#### ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICE

The article discusses three examples of women organised in community enterprises. The active participation of women involved in the process is mostly spontaneous, and their main aim is to improve their quality of life and that of their families and communities. They use their powers of leadership and take advantage of the role they have in their communities to promote the organisation.

Their practices aim at promoting local-, regional- and national-level transformations and, consequently, promote changes against discriminatory practices, counting concrete achievements in the legislation favouring rural populations and especially rural women.

The first example is the Manos Unidas ('United Hands') community enterprise of miners and farmers, which originated from the necessity of being a legal entity to have access to the State's gold and requiring some technical innovations to improve gold extraction techniques, jewelry manufacturing and marketing. These women were not allowed to handle the State's gold as individuals, but the organisation they created could have access to financial benefits and support. Also, the mining sector was institutionalised, employment increased and economic development improved through the work of the organisation. Second, the Paz Verde community enterprise of rural women in Quinchia was created on the same model as Manos Unidas but used a different process. Although some of the products those women are planting, cultivating and marketing are being processed, most of the products remain in the same community that has become a direct consumer. Finally, the Mujeres Ulloa community enterprise looks for development alternatives because there is no employment and without being organised they will not have enough food to support their households.

#### PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

The experience started with the sensitisation of women's group involved in agricultural production and their need to organise themselves in non-profit organizations, as community enterprises. Practices of alternative agricultural structures began with a State initiative to reform the agricultural sector. In Latin American, offers of em-

ployment are very scarce because of the high numbers of the active population. The lack of gender equality and ancestral customs marginalise women, assigning them only household responsibilities not shared within the family. Poverty, violence, a lack of opportunities and machismo have led to the abandonment, misery and marginalisation of women in rural areas. Women's organisations are crucial to help women climb out of the extreme poverty they face. Also, poverty has caused internal and external migration, with minors subsequently being left with relatives or friends interested in remittances sent by the mothers each month.

The community enterprises have been a good instrument to strengthen entrepreneurship among poor rural people, promoting the improvement of economic conditions in rural areas, especially for rural women, and generating a new space for participation, involvement, employment and the rehabilitation of rural areas. The women associates grow crops and produce food, not only for their households but also for trading it in the market places or in a barter system. Community enterprises have become model organisations aiming at social and economic development involving the whole family – each member with their own tasks. In Colombia, community enterprises started in 1961, regulated by the Law on Agriculture Social Reform aimed at strengthening peasants' rights to access to land, reforming the agricultural social structure, promoting the adequate economic exploitation of uncultivated land, creating new opportunities for small- and medium-scale farmers and raising the standard of living of peasants.

## CONCLUSIONS

The three initiatives all had one thing in common: the need of the families to generate income for their sustainability. Through the community enterprises peasants influenced development processes, created their own spaces and reached a compromise that brings economic and social benefits to the community. The community enterprises achieved not only a greater level of well-being, but even the political, social and economic empowerment of the community, which obtained spaces for participation according to the current legislation and some competitive advantages to improve their organisational processes and to strengthen the family, social and community environment.

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### **3.6. The Ricomida restaurant chain: healthy food as a sustainable economic alternative in Bolivia**

*Original article by Cecilia Estrada P. and Tatiana Collazos R.*

#### **ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICE**

The Instituto de Formación Femenina Integral (IFFI – Institute for Integrated Feminine Education) attracted the interest of women who wanted to get involved in creating a chain of family restaurants called ‘Ricomida’.

Ricomida is an economic enterprise owned by women. It offers meals every day promoting three basic elements: nutritional food, prepared hygienically, and with affordable prices. One of the main advantages for women is the quick generation of income, but also the possibility of working closely with their families and ensuring access to nutritional food. The project led to the opening of seven restaurants, which were a great success, and currently there are 38.

#### **PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?**

IFFI is a non-profit organisation mainly working with women in urban areas and supporting the active participation of women through actions aimed at promoting and strengthening democracy and economic justice. The strategic objectives at the heart of IFFI are oriented to the creation of proposals with social value and public impact, to mainstream a gender perspective on the social and public agenda, and to develop women’s capacities and women’s organisations.

In 2006, seven women started capacity-building on cooking techniques and food administration. The participants in the training courses came from suburban neighbourhoods and had similar socio-economic characteristics: scarce economic resources, low grade of education, workers of the informal sector with no technical skills.

#### **ANALYSIS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

The achievements made can be classified in relation to different perspectives. IFFI has developed a proposal for training and technical assistance appropriate to the

needs and requirements of entrepreneurs, and it has improved the performance and mechanisms for managing a revolving fund used to provide new capital to entrepreneurs and strengthen existing ones. The impacts of this support are crucial for setting up the restaurants and in many cases for supporting them even at a later stage.

In terms of the project's expected outcomes, the chain has grown geographically and contributed to improving eating habits of the women's families and of the customers; it has created the opportunity for people to eat food at affordable prices.

Difficulties were identified in the fact that the project is not yet consolidated business management training and that most of entrepreneurs do not own the restaurants and have to pay a monthly rent. Also, many women who expressed their interest in being part of the chain have no minimum requirements or qualifications or an entrepreneurial profile.

The evident impacts on the lives of the women entrepreneurs include:

- an improvement in their incomes and their level of empowerment;
- autonomy in decision-making;
- an overall advancement in their responsibility in family roles; and
- the implementation of principles of economic solidarity linked to the development of social capital.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the beginning, the project has taken into consideration a clear gender perspective. In this case study the entrepreneurial economic activity contributes to the economy of women's households and society, reassessing the theoretical and practical terms of the concept of social reproduction.

The main lessons learned as part of this experience are various. First, it has been noted that not all women who wish to develop an economic initiative have the adequate preparation to take on an entrepreneurial role. Second, it is evident that when considering successful initiatives from a gender perspective it is essential to take into account that women entrepreneurs simultaneously assume both productive and reproductive/domestic work. Finally, it is important to be able to analyse both economic and social factors in a comprehensive intervention.

Women entrepreneurs that have experienced the project are building values from a personal point of view but also as group values which go beyond the accumula-

tion of wealth and can provide a solid basis for the construction of an alternative economic paradigm.

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### **3.7. Transforming microfinance: popular and solidarity economy in the experience of BanMujer in Venezuela**

*Original article by Alba Carosio*

#### **ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICE**

This experience, even though very important for women's empowerment, has to be considered in the context of a government initiative. The public microfinance practice BanMujer is a bank for women's development that aims to support the creativity and the productive potential of the poorest women who live in the most precarious urban areas and in the remotest countryside areas of Venezuela. BanMujer is the only bank in Venezuela managed by women and oriented towards women's needs.

Its objectives are the eradication of poverty and exclusion that affect women, considering women's empowerment as an integrated process, not only depending on access to resources, but even aiming at changing power relations between women and men. The assumption at the basis of these achievements is the active participation of women through women's organisations, and the tool is microcredit.

BanMujer aims to transform and construct equitable relationships between women and men in all aspects of everyday life. It claims to favour the gender perspective approach in decisions and actions. It aims to include cooperation, solidarity, co-responsibility and common shared values in socio-productive activities carried out by women in poverty conditions. Also, it promotes social relations in the production process, recognising and respecting cultural diversity, social habits and practices.

Since the creation of BanMujer in 2001, a Grassroots Network of Users of BanMujer has been built up, which is an independent grassroots organisation promoting the sovereign socio-productive development led by women, their families and communities.

BanMujer mobilises communities through 'promoters' in charge of visiting neighbourhoods and hamlets, promoting women's organisations to carry out socio-productive initiatives. Grassroots women are provided with financial services such as microcredit and with non-financial services such as technical assistance in production, administration, marketing and organisation.

Promoters organise meetings at the local level and contact women who have already started an activity and aim to strengthen those initiatives, identify local needs and natural and human resources. To get this solidarity credit – characterised by

very low interest taxes – women have to be organised in ‘economic associative units’ or cooperatives and need to present a project of socio-productive investment.

Activities supported by BanMujer are: elaboration, fabrication and selling of hand-crafted economic goods; environmentally sustainable small-scale agriculture; eco-tourism; sustainable livestock, fish farming and beekeeping; production of services, such as plumbing, electricity, childcare, solidarity community activities; vigilance services and various other community services; and microtrade.

### **PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?**

In 1999, Venezuela published a new Constitution which commits to adopt gender as a cross-cutting issue and positive measures aimed at enabling women with full rights. Gender equality and social justice are perceived as an ethical imperative, part of the full development of human rights. The Constitution promotes the creation of a grassroots economy based on the values of cooperation, solidarity and equality.

Alongside the Constitution, the government adopted a law that created the institution of BanMujer and the Law on the Creation, Stimulation, Promotion and Development of the Microfinance System, oriented to facilitate access to financial and non-financial services for the communities which promote economic alternatives. This second law also created a Microfinance Development Fund.

### **ANALYSIS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

The main result can be found in the empowerment of women users of BanMujer, where empowerment is seen as the increasing capability to manage their lives. Family well-being of micro-entrepreneurs has increased, as has the women’s quality of life and level of independence and decision-making. BanMujer has also supported the creation and maintenance of networks of productive labour. It has developed a good reputation among governmental organisms and Venezuelan women’s organisations.

The main challenges that BanMujer confronts derive from the historical role of family carer assigned to women. The discontinuity in socio-productive activities is caused by family matters that impede women from spending energy and time in remunerated activities. The changes promoted have generated an increase in women’s tasks, and they have to add their new community and political roles to the old roles related to care. Most of the time, this attitude causes crisis. The promotion of cam-

paigns aimed at redistributing care responsibilities has not been developed, and the contradiction between productive and family life persist. Not even the Grassroots Network of Users of BanMujer has tried to promote an alternative vision reconsidering and rethinking care responsibilities.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the nine years of its existence, BanMujer has not only been consolidating during this time, but also deepening its mission and activities, and its socio-productive and theoretical contributions to a feminist socialism. This concept may be formulated as an ethical-political proposal asserting that feminism contributes to socialism with a different vision of the structure from domination/exploitation and a more inclusive strategy integrating the solidarity vision from a small, concrete and day-to-day approach.

Social emancipation towards equality, democracy and freedom can be possible only with a change in daily life, aiming at practices without hierarchies that thwart the system of gender roles on which patriarchy is based.

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### **3.8. Towards transformative advocacy models: women 's leadership in the informal economy of Lima, Peru**

*Original article by María Bastidas Aliaga*

#### **ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC PRACTICE**

This case study describes an experience of organisation and mobilisation of women working in the Peruvian informal economy in the Lima region. The organisation, Asociación de Desarrollo Comunal (ADC – 'Local Development Association'), started a programme to empower the network of women working in the informal economy, especially women belonging to the sectors of seasonal work, itinerant work and domestic work.

The practice developed served as a reference to promote other practices of the most democratic and inclusive participation in the area of intervention and to strengthen the existing women's organisations. The strategic alliance established between the women's organisations and the political and union institutions was the key to the continuity of the experience. This synergy between all stakeholders could bring about some important changes in the unjust social situations of women working in the informal economy.

#### **PROCESS: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?**

The feminisation of the urban informal labour force is quite widespread in Peru. The informal economies in which most women are 'employed' clearly show the lack of decent work conditions: the lack of labour rights, social protection, independent and democratic representation and employment. Women experience disadvantages and restrictions driven by from social and cultural rules related to gender stereotypes. Most of the time, women simply add remunerated work to their housework and care tasks, loading their day with triple responsibilities. Women are over-represented in the submerged economic market, especially the most precarious groups such as those belonging to the domestic services sector, non-remunerated family collaborators and domestic workers. Women working in the informal economy over-work, have a very low income and have no social protection or welfare benefits, with subsequent serious health conditions.

ACD started as a field study to identify and classify the organisations present on the ground. It was promoted as a campaign to raise public awareness on the im-

portance of collective actions. Then two training programmes were launched: one on female leadership oriented to prepare women to exercise their leadership and decision-making in their associations and professional organisations, and the other a training of trainers aimed at generating knowledge on human development and on educational, organisational, productive and entrepreneurial management and the cooperation of women's networks in the informal economy.

As follow-up to these two programmes, a women trainers' network and a support group of women leaders in the informal economy were formed, respectively, to strengthen educational training and to set the basis for an organisation that would strengthen and give effectiveness to their actions. Continuous dialogue and debate took place, and some criteria on active participation were established for the organisations that wanted to join the support group, such as willingness, active interest and compliance to reach group compromises.

The support group and its networking contributed to creating seven organisations and local and/or sector unions. Those organisations and unions ensure the defence of rights and interests of the women working in the informal economy.

### **ANALYSIS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

After the creation of the organisations and unions, the organisations of women working in the informal economy collaborated with public actors and civil society through seminars, meetings, workshops, presentations of material and research and open forums. These activities were supported at the regional and local level by the support group.

Cooperation with other women's organisations and feminist movements was less active, while the collaboration with local and regional governments developed through the public forums that sensitise and inform the general public about women's working conditions and the lack of labour, economic, social and cultural rights.

Cooperation with the governmental sector brought recognition of previously marginalised sectors at the institutional level and the adoption of a national law on equal opportunities for women and men. The law makes it possible to demand that competent authorities give their support to promote economic initiatives and/or business associations through municipal, labour and sector legislation to reduce time and costs.

The main difficulty can be found in the contradictions generated by the discourse

and the actions of the public sector; for instance, while it has been declared the intention to promote the legalisation of workers in the informal economy, itinerant vendors are often evicted from where they are trading.

In addition, the open spaces experimented with in trade unions are not enough to promote the authentic participation of women in this sector; more political will and concrete and critical reflection within the trade unions themselves are needed. Another difficulty confronted by women is the increase in their daily responsibilities accompanied by the total absence of legislative, political and social initiatives promoting reconciliation between family and work life.

## CONCLUSIONS

The learning spaces provided during the project promoted the strengthening of personal and collective abilities of the women working in the informal economy. Also, the experience contributed to strengthening the overall women's movement and to the empowerment of women working in the most marginalised sectors of the informal economy.

As a consequence, the situation of women working in the informal economy is now present on the public and social agenda. The integration of a gender perspective in everyday reality was an opportunity to promote the empowerment of women working in the informal economy, starting with better access to economic rights.

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