

WIDE Position on Rio+20 „The future we want“

From 1992 to 2012

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, was aimed at elaborating solutions to the global environmental problems by simultaneously recognizing and implementing the right to development of the poorer countries. Hence, the concept of sustainable development with its three pillars of environmental, economic and social sustainability was born. Essential aspects of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development were the „polluter pays principle“, the „principle of common but differentiated responsibility“, and the „precautionary principle“.

In the run-up to the Sustainability Summit ten years later, held in Johannesburg in 2002, disappointment about the low progress in implementing the Rio 92 goals was expressed. In Johannesburg, stakeholder partnerships were expected to bring about momentum for sustainable development.

Yet ten more years later, it has become clear that those expectations have not become true. Climate change is advancing, threatening the poorest – the majority of them women – most. Poverty and inequality between and within states as well as between women and men persist. The effects of the recent global food, energy, climate, financial and economic crises undo partial advancements. The present draft for the sustainability summit in June in Rio de Janeiro (Rio+20 Zero Draft document) shows a complete lack of any radical new orientation.

Already at UNCED in 1992, women’s organizations have formulated their vision of sustainable development in the „Women’s Action Agenda 21“. Therein, critique on the concept of the free market economy and economic growth was expressed. As an alternative, women called for an economy that respects biological as well as cultural diversity, for de-militarization, justice between North and South, empowerment of women through access to resources and democratic and reproductive rights. Unfortunately, these demands are still up-to-date and don’t find any echo in the Rio+20 Draft document.

WIDE analyses the propagated concept of a „Green Economy“ with regard to these demands - especially to the demand for new ethics of the market economy. Human Rights – women’s rights, rights of indigenous peoples – have to be at the centre of the „Green Economy“. Profit maximization has to be clearly limited.

Feminist and ecological critique of the neoclassic model of economy

Despite some progress in resource efficiency, the paradigm of wealth through permanent economic growth - growth of markets, production as well as of financial markets - is leading to a continuous increase in the use and exploitation respectively of human, social and natural resources. The continuous increase of energy requirements for production amounts to producing at the expense of the poor and the future generations.

The capitalist neoliberal market economy aims at the maximization of profits for enterprises by minimizing their social and environmental expenditure.

Social and environmental costs (such as costs for health as well as the remediation of polluted air, water, soil erosion, contamination, water and tear of infrastructure like roads etc.) are being transferred to local and regional communities, i.e. the public .

Therefore, the capitalist neoliberal market economy is in no way sustainable, neither socially nor environmentally nor economically. Social and ecological limits of growth are negated. Thereby, it is heading towards the destruction of the livelihood of humans and nature by over-exploiting natural resources and disregarding material limits (e.g. in exploitation of petrol, uranium etc.), combined with huge technological risks (nuclear energy, GMO).

Women's Rights

Compliance with human rights globally and for everybody must be the precondition and basis for a global sustainable development. Development must aim at the improvement of the livelihood of all the currently underprivileged human beings. Environmental and social policies are two sides of one coin. The right to water, food, clothing, housing, access to health care, education and resources must go hand in hand with the right to a healthy environment. This goal cannot be reached by general economic growth, but only by the protection of natural resources and redistribution - from the rich to the poor, from the powerful to the marginalized, from men to women, between and within states, societies and generations.

Women constitute the majority of the badly disadvantaged people in the world. Thus, gender justice is an indispensable precondition for a really sustainable development in its ecological, economical and social sense. Apart from the unjustifiable suffering caused by the far-reaching exclusion of women from political and economic life, it neglects essential potentials of women in regard to knowledge, capabilities, capacities and social visions. All spheres of life could benefit by making use of these potentials in order to promote sustainability.

Of course, the responsibility of states for the implementation of human rights first of all applies to the people living in their country. But in addition, states are also responsible for the implication of their policies that affect people living outside of their territory. Therefore, human rights have to have priority also with respect to sustainability, and the consequences of national or alliance (EU-) policies on the livelihood of women living in the global South have to be considered.

In many areas, this principle of „policy coherence“ is not respected - be it in Austria, in the EU or globally. The promotion of agro-fuels, bilateral and regional free trade agreements, direct and indirect export subventions, the de-regulation of financial markets lead to a weakening of regional markets in the South, they stimulate „land grabbing“ and lead to a loss of self determination and impoverishment of people in small scale agriculture and small scale production and trade. These trends affect women even worse than men, as women have less income, frequently double burdens and fewer resources altogether. Due to their living conditions, they are generally less mobile than men. They have fewer means to encounter the multiple crises caused by the above mentioned policies.

Even money reportedly spent on development assistance may serve the promotion of the industrialized countries own economy, while scope and ability of autonomous policy making of developing countries are constrained by WTO rules and other economic agreements. Though gender aspects are increasingly considered in development cooperation, women are often not consulted on development strategies (as required by CEDAW, article 14). The strong cuts of Austrian development aid since 2010 - for example of the funds for the Austrian Development Cooperation Agency or of UN institutions such as the UN Population Fund - have a negative impact on the achievement of the women-specific Millennium Development Goals (MDG) such as gender equity, reduction of maternal mortality and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The main demands in regard to women's rights:

- Human rights, including women's rights, must be central to a globally sustainable development instead of the dogma of economic growth;
- More democracy, participation, self determination, empowerment of women, gender quota in politics and economy, inclusion of women in the elaboration of development strategies and measures;
- Recognition of the knowledge, the capacities and qualifications of women, especially in the South, relying on these resources e.g. in areas like agriculture, seed conservation and development, biodiversity;
- Inclusion of women in all programmes regarding development, climate, environment and sustainability;
- Self determination of women over their own bodies as an inviolable matter of course; no violation of women's physical integrity, neither in the area of population policies nor by religious reasons; no instrumentalization of women's rights for other purposes (such as access to education as a means of population control).
- Increase of financial means for sexual and reproductive health of women; measures to reduce maternal mortality.
- Access to education and professional training for all girls and women to enable them to live a self determined, independent, satisfactory life;
- Decent labour conditions, de-precarization and respect of all labour rights, women's and human rights, especially in regard to female migrant workers;
- Promotion of public and collectively organized forms of "care"-economy, including the conservation of seed and other land resources; re-distribution of financial resources in order to ensure adequate payment in the care sector.
- Recognition of women-specific reasons for asylum (e.g. cruel punishment like stoning for adultery, sexual violence in the context of wars, extreme reduction of the freedom of movement like for instance in Afghanistan or Pakistan; risk of FGM).

A critical view of the presented concept of "Green Economy"

The current crises clearly indicate that the prevailing capitalist-neoliberal economic system has failed. It has led to redistributions from poor to rich at national as well as global levels. Women, to a great extent excluded from this system, are particularly affected by its implications. Nature ñ biologic diversity, seeds, soil etc. ñ is commercialized and traded as a commodity. As a consequence, indigenous peoples and traditional communities, among them women in particular, are increasingly deprived of access to, and control over natural resources. WIDE is afraid of the currently proposed concept of "Green Economy" perpetuating this trend.

In this concept, "Green economy" is being incorporated into the existing capitalist system instead of developing a holistic concept of sustainability that respects and integrates the limits of nature's ability to regenerate. Funds are to flow, markets and jobs are to be "greened". Business is to pay for environmental damage. States are to arrange for sustainable public procurement and infrastructure. But the "greening" of capitalism has failed so far. Just a new slogan of "Green Economy" does not solve anything.

The dictate of economic growth by definition based on the exploitation of nature and people is not contested in the Rio+20 Zero Draft Document. Yet again technologies are presented as a solution to the inequitable distribution of resources in spite of the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 70s

already having proven this as the wrong approach. A new “Green Revolution” using gene technology would not only be an ecological nonsense but also a threat to the human right to adequate nutrition as well as further marginalize women. Technologies as a means of production in the hands of the powerful will become instruments of exploitation in a capitalistic system.

New technologies are not only suggested to increase agricultural output but also to tackle climate change, among them carbon sequestration and storage or geo-engineering such as inoculation of clouds. People potentially affected by them are not taken into consideration. Inequitable distribution of resources as well as the root causes of the environmental and climate crises remain. Information about long-term risks of such technologies for people and the environment is not available. Lots of energy, resources and money would be engulfed by them instead of being used for sustainable measures to reduce energy consumption and the emission of greenhouse gas.

The rather generally worded definition of “Green Economy” by UNEP does not include the balance of the three pillars of ecological, economic and social sustainability. The “one size fits all” approach clashes with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility” of the original Rio-Declaration in accordance with the different conditions in the different countries. It may be misused by industrialized countries to justify unilateral trade protectionist measures and dictate standards of products and productions which are still unaffordable for poor countries. Already within the WTO, industrialized countries start building up pressure on developing countries to make them abolish customs duties for certain products declared as “ecological goods”. In fact in the course of the Doha negotiations, downsizing of trade barriers for eco-friendly goods and services has been asked for.

Access to new markets, gain of additional market shares and profit maximization are of course aimed at. Yet on the contrary industrialized countries responsible for environmental damage and climate change should, according to the “polluter pays principle”, take care of damage control and the reduction of their consumption of resources. At the same time they are to see a transfer of environmentally sustainable technologies to poor countries and assist them with the setup of ecological methods of production and ways of dealing with climate change. Propagating a biased “Green Economy” within a capitalistic and patriarchal system without the balance of the three pillars of sustainability may lead to further exploitation of the South and further marginalization of women.

From a feminist point of view a fundamental paradigm shift, accompanied by transitory strategies linked to realistic political assessments is indispensable.

The cornerstones of such a shift:

- Redistribution and revaluation of labour towards “Care Economy”, smallholder and ecologic agriculture, local food production and regional economic cycles,
- Reclamation of public goods,
- An economy based on the limits of the ability of nature and general welfare to regenerate as well as on a good life for everybody within these limits by reallocation of resources,
- Phasing-out of the economic growth spiral with its exploitation of nature, production and over-consumption,
- Cost transparency of production and transport systems including their damage to environment, climate, health, biologic diversity,
- Access to resources for, and empowerment of women as well as social justice.

Concrete demands concerning “Green Economy”:

- Equal consideration of all the three pillars of sustainability, i.e. repudiating the imperative of economic growth measured by the GDP of a country.
- No undermining of Human Rights such as the right to adequate nutrition, no neglecting of women’s rights.
- Empowerment of women as an essential prerequisite of a sustainable economic system.
- Fair and equitable terms for countries of the North and the South in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.
- Adjusting the global economic system towards food sovereignty for all countries and regions, regional economic cycles and the reduction of transport routes.
- Empowerment and support of peasant farmers working in keeping with nature, of women responsible of conserving and advancing seeds and biodiversity (no second Green Revolution using gene technology!).
- Taxation of transport and agricultural production in relation to the damage to biodiversity, environment, climate, and health they cause.
- Access to land, water, seeds for everybody who is dependent on them and stop to land grabbing with special consideration of women.
- Participation, as a matter of course, of communities, indigenous peoples and citizens in the development of strategies and projects that will affect them.
- Revaluation of labour, upgrading of social jobs, expansion of the care economy, employment and social programmes to ensure basic security.
- No pure technological solutions which might endanger social and gender equity, no hazardous technologies such as carbon-sequestration, nuclear energy, geo-engineering, nano, neuro, or gene technology.
- No commercializing of nature by patents, trade with pollution certificates etc.
- Promoting the switch from fossil energy to sun, wind and water as sustainable energy carriers (no nuclear energy, no agro-fuels).
- Renunciation of the current exploitative consumption and production patterns of industrialized countries, the causes of the prevailing crises.
- Abolishing or modifying redundant industries such as arm production.
- Ban on any financial speculations on food, water and land as well as strict controls and supervision of the financial market.
- Work on new indicators for development and the quality of life to replace the assessment of the status of development according to the GNP.

Institutional Perspectives

The current mesh of institutions at the international level so far has failed to implement sustainable development. The complex concept involves a great variety of policy areas, international regulations, decisions and demands as well as institutions. Therefore, much more interaction, networking, coordination and coherence is called for. A competent institutional framework equipped with sufficient resources and clout has to be installed in order to bring together the various areas of sustainable development, interlink and coordinate them. It has to ensure that policies in the areas of environment, climate, agriculture, food security, empowerment of women, poverty

eradication, trade, financial market regulation and many others are consistent with development policies. The various measures must not counteract each other. None of the three pillars of sustainable development must be neglected, none of the principles ignored.

Networking between UN environment organizations, the Human Rights system (the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESC) rights, Civic and Political Rights, the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) is essential for sustainable development as is cooperation and coordination among each other. The observation of Human Rights for everybody must have to priority and special consideration given to the rights of women and the eradication of any kind of discrimination against women. Gender equity has to penetrate every policy area.

An institution in charge of equitable distribution is to develop an international system of taxes in accordance with criteria of sustainable development. It has to take into account the pollution of the environment, inequitable distribution of property and wealth, profits by financial transactions etc. The financial markets have to be strictly supervised.

The new institutional framework should be:

- based on the already existing agenda for a sustainable development,
- capable of reacting to the present challenges such as climate change, limited natural resources, increase of poverty and inequity in the world as well as the current governance crises in the economic and financial sectors.
- endowed with legal obligations making official and private actors accountable for the disregard of any commitment of this framework.
- creating coherent strategies in terms of sustainable development applicable in the areas of development, agriculture, trade, finance, investment, climate change, protection of ecosystems as well as in the private sector.

Further demands:

- Upgrading of the Convention on the Biological Diversity (CBD of 1992), which should see to an end of commercializing biologic resources and a guarantee of access to them for everybody.
- Transformation of UNEP into a proper UN Environment Organization (UNEO).
- Control mechanism and institution for the financial markets.
- International tax cooperation in order to globally ensure sufficient funds for public tasks and services.

Demands directed to the Austrian government

WIDE Austria supports the list of demands to the Austrian government concerning the UN summit on Environment and Development from 20 to 22 June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro (Rio+20) put down in the paper of May 2012 “Gerechtigkeit in einer endlichen Welt” (Equity in a Limited World) by an initiative of Austrian environment and development organizations including WIDE Austria.

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