

## **Feminist Economic Alternatives**

Report from an ActionAid webinar

By Margaux Bolzan

Action Aid organised a webinar on the 9th of December 2020 and gathered experts to discuss about a new report which provides policy and analytical frameworks of Feminist Economic Alternatives (FEAs). The speakers were Mariama SONKO (president of the NSS/We Are the Solution, Senegal), Soledad SALVADOR (economist and researcher on development and gender at the Interdisciplinary Center for Development Studies, Uruguay) and Roos SAALBRINK (policy and advocacy manager on women's economic rights at Womankind Worldwide).

The moderators, Rachel WALKER (Women's Rights Campaign Manager in ActionAid Netherlands), Lila CABELLERO (Head of research and Programme Policy in ActionAid UK) and Fatimah KELLEHER (International Women's Rights Strategic and Technical Adviser) introduced this topic by pointing out the fact that the prevailing economic system serves both to exploit and exacerbate women's relative position of economic, social, and political exclusion. It is precisely the overreliance on women's underpaid labour and the exploitation of natural resources that sustain the exploitative and extractive neoliberal economic model. The pursuit of this model based on endless economic growth and trade liberalisation leads, among others, to the privatisation of public goods and public services, the deregulation of labour and to even more gender inequalities.

*“At the economic level it means going beyond the artificial and even false categories of perpetual economic growth, so-called free trade, consumerism and competitiveness. It means shifting to a focus on planetary and human well-being... to living well, to not having more, to valuing cooperation rather than competitiveness”.*

Vandana Shiva in Mies and Shiva's "Ecofeminism"

### ***But first, how can we define the feminist economic alternatives?***

The main aim is to provide approach alternatives to mainstream economic norms and implement new economic models, frameworks and strategies which all tend to transform gendered and oppressive power relations and address women's position of structural disadvantage. According to the ActionAid report, feminist economic alternatives are based on the values of women's autonomy and leadership, cooperation and solidarity, democracy and pluralism, local knowledge, freedom from gender-based violence and caring for all forms of life.

The ActionAid report and the webinar are structured around three important notions: to invest in the care economy, to promote the agroecology and to assert women's economic rights. Some of the most relevant recommendations of this report were presented and then illustrated by examples shared during the webinar.

### ***Investing in the care economy***

- **For governments:** Increase tax-to-GDP ratios at least to 20% in order to provide quality public services that are gender-responsive.
- **For International Financial Institutions (IFIs):** Stop promoting privatisation of public goods and services and reverse privatisation of public services.

Soledad Salvador asked how to convince people that gender equality really contributes to human economic and social development. On the premise that the redistribution of resources is a fundamental key, she decided

to fight for an Integrated National Care System (SNIC) and gathered various experts (sociologists, academics, economists, UN and NGOs) to put an end to gender inequalities in the country's households. In 2010, they managed to make the SNIC one of the Uruguayan government's priorities which was finally implemented in 2015 and enshrined in a legal document explicitly recognising both the right to receive quality care and rights of paid carers (women as men) to perform their work in decent working conditions. However, dialogue with the current political personnel is harder than before and she regrets that the new centrist right-wing government's priorities are to reduce public spending. The healthcare system is essential and the numerous advantages of these FEAs should be emphasised even more, such as the good development of children, additional time for training women in the labour market and jobs creation.

### ***Agroecology***

- **For governments:** Invest in research and development on proven agroecological practices and enact policies to prevent land grabbing.
- **For IFIs:** Support countries to develop and implement national climate policies.
- **For companies:** Guarantee a living wage for all workers (including in their supply chain).

ActionAid defines agroecology as “a sustainable approach to farming to produce healthy food and preserve natural resources, applying social, biological and agricultural sciences and integrating these with traditional, indigenous and farmers' knowledge and cultures”. Mariama Sonko introduced the campaign she presides, “We are the solution” (WAS) launched in Senegal in 2011 by women from different countries (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Senegal). As she stated, the agro-industrial policy imposed by multinationals is fragile, dangerous and even destructive in its socio-economic and environmental impacts. Therefore, the WAS campaign's aim is threefold: to promote good local agricultural practices and knowledge, to influence decision-makers and to value family agricultural production. To fulfil this aim, different kind of actions are used such as advocating for farmer's rights, promoting the local consumption or trainings for rural women in leadership, production techniques and essential management knowledge. However, the WAS team has to face two challenges. The first one is to advocate for a funding through the Maputo Convention which provides a guarantee of 10% of the state's budget for agriculture, but nothing was actually allocated to agroecology and rural agriculture. The second is that currently their products are not subsidized by the state, so all the products are sold at the same price on the market. Finally, to strengthen food sovereignty, the state funding of products coming from the agroecology must be deployed in other countries.

### ***Women's economic rights***

- **For governments:** Redistribute wealth by instituting systems of progressive taxation with a gendered lens, tackling illicit financial flows and closing tax havens.
- **For IFIs:** Materialise a more democratic global tax system hosted within the UN where each country has one vote.
- **For companies:** To become tax-responsible and pay more taxes in the countries where their profits are created. And to conduct gender-responsive human rights due diligence throughout their entire operations.

According to Fatimah Kelleher, the GDP's type of calculation is a telltale of how much the structure of our economic model is unequal and oppressive so she suggested to focus on the unpaid work but also to looking

for a more efficient indicator than the GDP. The FEAs actually focus on the importance of unpaid work on GDP growth and try to emphasize on social and solidarity economies, but generally, they are still neglected.

Roos Saalbrink, from the GATJ (Global Alliance for Tax Justice), promoted the creation of a feminist tax system guaranteeing gender, social and economic equality and ensuring women's rights. Such a system can generate sufficient public revenue while ensuring fairly redistributed revenues. The GATJ is asking for the creation of an Inclusive Intergovernmental UN Global Tax Commission and for an UN Binding treaty on business and human rights, both steps towards more accountability, to ensure the redistribution of resources and set policies for a fairer economy. Moreover, she highlighted a current harsh reality: the redistribution of wealth in our current tax system is structurally unequal. Women pay relatively more taxes because of the way it is structured, so tax regimes are not gender neutral. Therefore, reducing unfair tax burdens on women and adopting progressive and fair taxes is heavily required. For example, the property tax returns are more beneficial to men because they are more often owners. But we can also talk about the well-known 'Tampon Tax' which is the Value Added Tax applied to the sale of sanitary protection products like tampons that are currently classed as 'luxury' or 'non-essential' products in several countries. Yet, the recent great news concerning period poverty come from Scotland which recently became the first nation to provide free period products for all.

The main conditions of the feminist economic alternatives' implementation can be resumed in three parts. First, to implement gender-sensitive fiscal, monetary and investment policies. Second, to support transparent, democratic and participatory decision-making processes, and finally to conduct measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women. To conclude, a systemic transformation is required to change the material realities in the lives of women and the structures of power through new gender and power norms.

Report:

Action Aid (19.11.2020): [Another world is possible: Advancing feminist economic alternatives to secure rights, justice and autonomy for women and a fair, green, gender equal world](#)

About the author:

Margaux Bolzan holds a Master in Political Sciences from the University of Bordeaux. She currently cooperates with WIDE in the context of an Erasmus+ scholarship.

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