

Feminist alternatives for social justice: From a capitalist “care-less” economy towards a solidarity-based “care-full” economy 29th September 2010

Meanwhile individuals all over the world are bearing the costs of the crisis, the (mainly men) elite continue to do business as usual. After all, they are not the ones who have to pay the bill: It is the poorest of the world who suffer the most.

The outcomes of the financial crisis, starting from the US real estate breakdown in 2008 and resulting in the worst global recession since 1930, have been felt all over world. Although the scope of the crisis came as a shock, it had been predicted by many critical economists, women organizations and other civil society actors for a long time ago. The unsustainable “megatrend” behind the development of financial sector capitalism has been the enormous accumulation of private investment capital starting as early as 1970’s when the post-war created Bretton Woods system, designed to regulate the international monetary flows, was abandoned. Since then, several financial crises have occurred, most of them in developing countries (for example in Latin America, Asia and Russia) when opening their economies to international capital markets. There is one big difference, though, between the present crisis and the previous ones: this time the industrialized countries stand at its center.

The gap between the poor and rich countries and inequalities in societies are growing. Past financial crisis in Latin America, Asia, Russia, as well as the crisis of the New Economy 2000, have shown that financial markets can be stabilized quite quickly, but that the lives of the poor – particularly women – are always mortgaged long term. As a result of the crisis, there is a widening asymmetry, both between North and South and within individual countries. Contrary to the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals, the number of hungry and malnourished people in the world increased to one billion in 2009 and the political, economical and social rifts between men and women are growing everywhere.

Women are carrying a heavy burden of the crisis and compensating for the loss of social services. When the time comes to pay back the national debt, women will be the hardest hit.

The reduction in governmental debt is usually associated with a loss of social services (such as health, education and care-giving) which, in turn, has a major impact on the most vulnerable groups in society, such as migrants, children, unemployed, elderly and other marginalized people. WOMEN are disproportionally affected by the loss of social services due to the traditional division of work in society that place WOMEN as the main care-providers and the discrimination they suffer in the labor market. When the time comes to pay back the national debt, women will be the hardest hit. For these reasons, it does not make sense to simply repair the existing neoliberal system and restore the pre-crisis unbalanced economy which will most probably lead to a new disaster.

WIDE perceives this situation as an opportunity to question the global economic order suggesting that the economy should move from the capitalist profit making back to fulfilling its original function: assuring the survival of humanity, in a human way. What we need is a turn away from the growth paradigm. From a feminist point of view, it is necessary to focus on providing people with vital goods and to give them access to resources and social services.

One of the causes of the outbreak of the crisis is the quasi-religious absolutisation of the market as ‘omnipotent’ and ‘omniscient’. The free play of market forces, cut loose from any social and

ecological considerations, were believed to ‘bring universal happiness’. With such a narrow understanding of the basics of economics and the idea of human beings as “homo economicus” whose sole motivation is to maximize profit, there is a risk of economics becoming an end in itself. Additionally, this narrow perspective offered by the capitalist economy and its ambition to achieve maximum profit with minimum use of funds ignores parts of the economy as the reproduction of life and nature which are vital and indispensable to all.

Care work is an indispensable element not only for human reproduction but for the functioning of the economy as a whole. Although care work cannot be measured against the same efficiency criteria as market-based economic activities, it is an essential factor in analyzing both national and global economy. We must pay attention to the social and ecological processes which evolve within national economies, but are excluded from the markets and kept invisible by logics of growth and profit.

From a capitalist “care-less” economy towards a solidarity-based “care-full” economy. Democratization of economic relations would re-connect the economy with social relations as well as with the environment.

At the outset of crisis, promises were made to reform the financial markets, to guarantee their transparency and democratic regulation, however, little has been done so far. The EU and its member states have been, first and foremost, concerned of ensuring the functioning and competitiveness of their national economies. Blaming the greed of investment bankers as root cause of the crisis has further distracted the attention away from the governments who themselves played, and still continue to play, an important role in facilitating the expansion of markets. In short, instead of thinking about alternative and more democratic patterns of production, trade and consumption, the policy responses taken by governments and financial institutions are aimed to get back in the “normal”.

Those governing us choose to ignore that the crisis is not just about financial markets, but it is also a social and ecological crisis. Instead, the social sector, the environment, and social services are still not recognized as important elements of the economy and the unpaid care work, mostly done by women, continues to act as the hidden basis of the so called real and financial economy.

WE need to move from a capitalist “care-less” economy towards a solidarity-based “care-full” economy. This democratization of economic relations would re-connect the economy with social relations as well as with the environment. Based on a redistribution and revaluation of waged labor and care labor, of production and reproduction, and building on a decentralized and gender sensitive “bottom-up” vision, this new economic order would give preference to provision for all and cooperation over growth, competition and profit maximization.