

Women's Rights in Development: Feminist and Social Alternatives to the Development Agenda

Workshop held during the XXII Latin-American Prime Minister's and Government's Summit, in Cádiz (Spain) organized by the Spanish WIDE Platform (WIDE-E), the NGO for Development Network (CONGDE), the regional and national gender groups network (GGEA network) and the feminist network (Marea Violeta-Málaga)

This workshop took place at the Puerto Real Campus, University of Cádiz, 17th of November 2012.

1. Introduction

This initiative stems from our present socio-political context which is framed by a systemic global crisis. It is a multiple and interrelated crisis; a crisis of the Capitalist System and the Patriarchal Model with impacts on economic, financial, ecological, and political levels that compromise the stability of social and sexual agreements with enormous repercussions on local, regional and global levels. The most fundamental Human Rights of millions of people are at risk; Women's rights being even more deeply affected.

As a solution to this crisis, we are lead to believe what the alliance of economic and political powers consider is our only way out: the reorganization and radicalization of that same model which has driven us to our present situation. What to practical effect means: lower budgets in social areas, privatization of public services and public property, the criminalization of social movements, and a reinforced patriarchal conservatism that repositions women at home by attacking those rights acquired by the fight for Women's Rights by Feminist Movements of the past.

Facing this onslaught, there has been a large mobilization and multiplication of spaces of resistance promoted by a variety of groups and social movements in neighborhoods, cities, and villages that demonstrate social unrest and the existence of a number of alternatives, many of which are based on a feminist and anti-capitalist perspective that complements and strengthens other social demands. Certainly, we cannot forget that this crisis is negatively impacting the lives of women by impoverishing their incomes and leaving their professional lives in a precarious situation.

2. Objectives

This workshop was organized as a way to recruit the active involvement and participation of a diverse group of social participants including feminists and women from diverse organizations from Spain and Latin America; with the objective of creating a space for reflection on the changes being produced as a result of the international financial/speculative crisis occurring in Latin America and Europe. Spain has been especially affected by the recession and one of the objectives of the workshop was to share a variety of analytical views from a feminist perspective in distinct social areas and in terms of social development.

Moreover, from our diversity, nuances and specific agendas we sought to develop concrete proposals of action concerning our shared analysis of this new context. Our objective in doing so was to identify areas of strategic incidence and to strengthen the mobilization and the diversity of proposals from a gender perspective, human rights, equality, justice and solidarity.

3. Content and Perspectives

Rosabel Agirregomezkorta, as WIDE-E coordinator, welcomed the participants in name of the promoting entities and explained the methodology and structure of the workshops, as being divided in three blocks. The first block analyzed the developmental model; the second block is centered around the strategies and attacks against Women's Rights with a special focus on Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights and Gender Violence.

The debates began with a brief analysis presented by some participants as starting point to the collective debate.

1. Our Model of Development

This first block was centered on questioning the developmental model based on the commercial exploitation of life and the resources that put sustainability at risk and cause social inequality. This recession give us the opportunity to revise and transform the economic models of the past which have been proven to be unsustainable. A diversity of proposals and critiques were exposed, all of which focused on the needs of people, and concerned with the current paradigm of Care and "Buen Vivir".

Concha García, CONGDE's Board member, analyzed the state of the Spanish cooperation sector, expressing we are at a crucial moment in which the four pillars of our work are collapsing and which will require us to re-think our models and concepts used in the past.

On one hand, the very idea of *Development* must be brought into question through a conglomerate of post-developmental proposals that included issues ranging from decreasing economic growth to well-being. In second place, the term “*Well-Being*”, in special regarding the left parties, as generates divisions of whether or not we should continue to defend a Welfare State as such, or if we ought to, on the contrary, refocus our efforts towards overcoming it. Linked to this analysis, the concept of *Democracy* is being undermined as spaces for civil participation are reduced. Lastly, the term *South* loses meaning on some levels because the crisis is affecting the North in such a way that it is comparable to the context affecting the South for decades.

The main debates within the CONGDE are focused on the following topics:

- The relationships between NGOs and private companies;
- The relationships between social movements, abandoning the divisions that characterized us in the past in favor of a collective and joint collaboration;
- Reflection on the NGOs organizational model and decision making, linked to the idea of what we, as NGOs, wish to become.

The government defines NGOs as agencies that organize and execute projects, but considers that these projects are not socially legitimate. That is why it is reducing the number of NGOs. In opposition to this premise, the NGOs debate their identities so as to find a way to survive. Some of them are planning on rebuilding themselves as Solidarity and Volunteer Committees, which are similar structures to their beginnings from 20-30 years ago, with an aim of mobilization and political pressure.

This process is accompanied by a strong delegitimization campaign in which NGOs have contributed to what is happening. Concha also mentioned that now is the time to re-think some issues, and that we could re-evaluate some of the topics that are on our list of priorities, such as gender issues and the reduction of public funding.

Anabel Santos, from the *Marea Violeta-Málaga*, reflected on key points for feminist cooperation. In this sense, she defended that, in order to face changing context and concepts re-definition, the feminist paradigm should stem from the condemn of the neoliberal patriarchal paradigm, as well as the recognition of the dire fact that without Women’s Rights there are no Human Rights.

For feminists, development includes sustainable human development focus on gender, in which women and men are at the center of politics. With this aim, real and mainstream empowerment of women is needed. On the other hand, the transformation of roles also is key, without regards to the way named: co-responsibility, care ethics or *Buen Vivir* (well-being).

For this, we need agendas based on action, and we should we avoid throwing away the work that has already been done.

Also she mentioned that we cannot develop a Gendered Cooperation without revising methodologies and leaderships, defending feminist pedagogies based on participation, gender audits and the systematization of processes. She mentioned Latin American organizations as an example for this methodology. If care is at the center of our theories and practices, it should also be included in the methodologies of our processes, referring specifically to the need of self-care.

Lilian Celiberti (from *Cotidiano Mujer* and *Articulación Feminista Marcosur*) shared the debates and the analysis present in Latin America.

Many concepts are at debate, failed by reality. In her opinion, this crisis reflects this key point, which is that the capitalism has arrived to its limits. This certainty opens the possibility of the need to reflect upon other aspects as:

1. In first place, the urgency to decolonize our imaginations, given that the imaginative horizon in social, cultural, political and economic rights belonged to the Euro-occidental civilization, as well as the Welfare State which guarantees these rights. It implies that we must use other roads to reach other places. In this sense, in Latin America, the *Buen Vivir*, promoted by indigenous people, emerge as an alternative model which provides greater nexus with Nature.
2. Relating to it, we are now in search for alternatives to the Development model, given that it is based on a system of submission even in Marxist proposals. So, in Latin America, models are being questioned and the *Buen Vivir* proposes another horizon that questions consumerism, and the link between consumption and citizenship. Being able to think if it is possible to live other ways is a political task for everyone.
3. This civilizing crisis also implies a crisis for institutions. People lose their trust in democracy and the institutions created, including NGOs. For this reason, we must find out new approaches.
4. Lastly, Lilian emphasized that we must beligerantly care for our hope because without it there is no possibility for change. Also, she stated that alternative thinking is powered by the belief that change is possible.

Alicia Delgado, from the feminist Fund *Fondo Calala*, shared her experience with the functioning of Women's Funds, a fairly unknown initiative in Spain. Calala was created in 2009, with the support of other Women's Funds, especially of the Central American Women's Fund, in order to mobilize political and economic solidarity in support of the women's and feminist movements in Latin America.

The debate in this first block collected and valued the proposal to decolonize the imagination and the practice proposed by Lilian, including the inside of the feminist movement, and the importance of systematizing processes that are used as learning tools that must include more detail than just memories and revising our praxis.

A struggle with language was evident once again, and some voices mentioned the need to explain and explicit exactly what type of development was being discussed.

Regarding what must be placed in the center of our attention, some participants mentioned inequality and others suggested that gender must be focused on. Also, one participant stated that feminist must defend the welfare State as it is the body that guarantees Rights.

2. Capitalist Patriarchy Offensive

The second block of debates was focused on manifestations of the patriarchal capitalist offensive specially focus on Health, Reproductive and Sexual Rights, and Gender Violence.

2.1 Social Reconfiguration of Women's Bodies through Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Some initiatives as the *Decidir Nos Hace Libres* platform were presented. This platform was created as reaction to the legislative reform of the Organic Law 2/2010 on *Sexual and Reproductive Health*, and the abortion. They organized a campaign, presented a manifesto and collected signatures.

Rocío Mateo (Puntos Subversivos) noted that the Law 2/2010 was an advance in terms of equality and sexual rights although it was not ideal as it promotes, increasingly in current period, a patriarchal control through:

- the presence of the Catholic Church in Ethic Committees at Hospitals;
- Difficulties to access abortion services;

- Elimination of Sexual Education, that implies less freedom and a greater probability of risky conduct;
- Idealization of Maternity;
- Perverse use of Language, for example, exchanging the term “pro-choice” for “pro-death”.

As a consequence, a greater class breach is formed due to the reduced access to public funds does not affect members of different social classes in the same way.

Lilian Celiberti reviewed the current situation relating to sexual and reproductive rights in Latinamerica, and manifested her concern for the situation of inequality between the Central American region, more fundamentalist, and the rest of the countries and the political weight of the Catholic Church.

Finally, we attended a **Virtual Meeting** between Latina Americans and Spanish Women on Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Rights, organized by Solidaridad International and Fundación Mujeres. This video is accessible at YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJvoZoRwRvA&feature=youtu.be>

In **the debate** some participants defended that the current Law, based on deadlines for abortion, was not the law that feminists wanted, but that it is better than the previous one based on restricted cases for abortion.

The majority of voices agreed that the main problems faced by the law are related to its implementation given that has not been assumed by Public Health Services, having to be attended to by private clinics. For this reason, it is of fundamental importance to speak out against the non-fulfilment by the Spanish government.

Also, there is a clear consensus on the fact that abortion should be a central point on our agenda, at all levels.

2.2 Gender Violence: Structural/Intersectional and Invisible Violences

After a break for lunch, we began an analysis on diverse types of violence that endanger the women’s free exercise of citizenship.

Carmen Martín, from *Forum de Política Feminista* (FPF), remembered that the feminist movement was the one identifying diverse forms of violence and elaborated a Gender Theory to explain violence and abuse while also creating alternative proposals and solutions.

In her opinion, we are witnesses to a patriarchal offensive to feminist advances and Women’s Rights. It is a reaction linked to the previous feminist advance.

She also called out the importance of the diversity of the violence expressions: in language, sexism, body and image worship, tales, neo-machismo and a long etc. There are other institutional violence types in which Governments are negligent in their responsibilities and do not create mechanisms for the application of the laws by which they are committed to gender equality and the eradication of violence. For example, the resistance of judicial structures through sentences that minimize violence, the increase in prostitution and women's sexual trade, as well as the loss of women's control of their own bodies.

The exit, in her opinion, could be led by empowerment, raising awareness and the creation of networks and joint.

María Naredo (from the feminist collective Las Tejedoras, and Amnesty International's collaborator) explored some topics related to legal issues, and specifically focused on Law 1/2004, led by Spanish government as an example of its political focus on Equality when, in regards to Latin America, we are very behind (according to shadow reports and following data from international mechanisms).

This law is the first Spanish legal instrument which mentions discrimination, but it is only focused on the aspect of the domestic violence. She also highlights that if there is any type of reduction of patriarchy it is in the judicial system, in its most ample area: judges, prosecutors, police, etc. A fact of the judicial patriarchy is that 50% of the cases of domestic violence are archived and another 50% are absolved.

Iliana Pereyra (from REPEM, Women's Popular Education Network), who participated via skype, reflected on economic violence.

Latin American economic and social contexts are very different from Spain, having a variety of progressive governments, economic growth and lower unemployment rates.

However, in spite of this positive economic situation in Latin America, the strength of patriarchal systems has increased. Latin America is one of the world regions with greater indexes of inequality in the world, and among those affected by this injustice are women and indigenous groups.

We are in a context of a social reproductive crisis (not only in terms of human life, but especially referred to nature). This means that life as a whole is on the border of danger. The majority of humanity is living in an insecure economic and social situation that greatly jeopardizes our possibilities of leading a dignified life.

Lucía Mora Palacios (Stopfemicide Platform) shared the situation of migrant women, with a special mention towards Ecuatorian women in Spain, that compose the third biggest migrant population in Spain after Moroccan and Romanian Women.

These migrant women live in situations of direct violence (deportations), cultural violence (they are criminalized as being one of the causes of the economic crisis in Spain), and institutional violence (because they face many restrictions and obstacles to be legally recognized as living in Spain).

Ecuatorian women work as caretakers and domestic laborers. They are returning after having lost their jobs, and their healthcare cards, as well as often losing their residency cards.

Lucía wondered where the Spanish feminists were. She accused this collective of not supporting or organizing protests to fight for the rights of migrant women, who are vulnerable not only because of their mistreatment but also because of their lack of supportive social networks to ask for help from.

4. Conclusions.

In spite of the diversity and plurality of the organizations and feminist networks and social participants, we share the critical thinking towards current economic, political and social model (based on capitalist and patriarchal thinking). We are critical of these systems because of the negative impacts on women's lives and sustainability.

During the first block we discussed that this economic crisis is breaking down well-known and accepted social concepts, as many concepts and paradigms like "Development", "Democracy", and "Welfare State". Also, the need to change political action, and the need to promote synergies between women and feminists.

Lastly, the economic crisis is emphasizing the need of looking for new ways to finance NGOs and associations, and creating a common agenda. Some strategies were proposed like defending treaties and agreements like CEDAW, Beijing, and Cairo+20. Another area to work mentioned was the need to promote Latin America and Spanish feminist as they both are being attacked by the same system.

In short, this workshop was the first step towards building a network based on collective action and exchange. We returned home with a strong objective of continuing to knit our ties together and planning our common agendas to keep the fight for the defense of Women's Rights.