



Women's rights in Europe and working with partners in the South **Gigi Francisco, DAWN (Philippines)**

Let us take stock of our global context in the financial crisis. I would like to start by sharing with you what a friend has written, he is an economist-founder of the Freedom from Debt Coalition in the Philippines and this is what he said:

"The US \$700 billion dollar bailout provides a useful metric to understanding debt write-offs. With a lot of fanfare, conditionality, public sector reforms, activist efforts and eleven years, the Bretton Woods Institutions, the US, and EU have trumpeted during the Financing for Development review sessions that they have written off in the order of \$100 billion in developing country debt. Of course, only a small number of countries benefited. Within two weeks, the US got ready to write-off \$700 billion, and then we have to add what the Europeans are writing off. It is unconceivable that HIPC countries, whose debt obligations and arrears are already estimated (unlike the actual cost in the developed countries), will continue to service their debt and undertake conditionality in order to at least partly fund the bailouts in the developed countries."

This raises the question of what the contribution of the EU was to the financial meltdown and also what the implication are as a result, not just on Europe but for development globally?

Global governance refers to a diverse range of cooperative, problem-solving arrangements involving global concerns. The world has mechanisms for this: at the centre is the inter-governmental platform of the UN that many of us in civil society believe is the principal space for multilateral actions and to which other bodies ought to be aligned, such as the WTO, IMF, WB and including the exclusive clubs of G7 and the OECD-DAC. I recall that for the longest time, the women's movements challenged global cooperative arrangements and so-called consensus by flagging women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, in international agendas and debates especially in the UN where our participation as civil society is institutionalised. But the question for women's movements now is: what have we really achieved from all these efforts? If we are questioning the EU's role as a global actor on the global stage, the women's movements also have to question our own tactics and strategies and the results of our actions at a global level.

We certainly have achieved much in terms of elaborating and expanding on the meaning and scope of human rights. However, some writers claim that the women's movements have also contributed to the emergence of a monoculture of instrumentality that has gradually characterised global governance. For instance, the discourse on rights-based development wherein women's human rights is central, is being replaced by the technicalities and tools of gender mainstreaming that is premised on a narrow understanding of women's rights. The switch to gender mainstreaming increasingly led us away from challenging the system, from questioning the ideological frameworks of states and their neo-liberal approach to globalisation. Ironically, gender mainstreaming was an attempt by activists to introduce women's human rights in various places in order to put in place a more

humane and equal world - that is where we started from many years ago- but it has led instead to a monoculture of instrumentality. We now face the risk of women's human rights or aspects of gender equality being exclusively framed by processes where the needs of the market have been -prioritised by governments, not least by the EU, in the areas of trade, aid effectiveness (the Paris Declaration), in investments, FTAs, debt and development. There is now a 'cherry picking' approach to international human rights which leads to a rather restricted set of women's human rights and gender equality goals, norms and standards, all tending to emphasize on women taking hold of market opportunities while holding states accountable for a least number of development outcomes for women and the poor.

Linked to this, positive conditionality has been increasingly used as a mechanism by the EU in its international trade agreements, finance and aid policies. Women's movements in the East and in the South, and some women's movements in the North, do not agree with this kind of thinking. For instance, a network of women that includes DAWN, WIDE and AWID has come together around the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development (FfD) to strongly challenge this concept of positive conditionality. We support universal responsibility and accountability for gender equality, and commitments to gender-based monitoring and evaluation tools and methodologies, but these need to be mutually developed by both developed and developing countries and must be able to adequately respond to the issues of developing countries. What we are saying is that the South is contesting the existing mode used to implement a rights based approach to multilateralism that the EU, as a global player, pushes in the international realm. The current approach is an imposition, there is a lot of rhetoric on human rights but in reality the means are instrumental, it is an externally-driven process framed along a single model of development that evidence shows has tended to increase rather than decrease social inequalities. Moreover, concepts, such as the responsibility to protect human rights could undermine the democratic fabric as well as the vibrancy of the social movements in various countries and contexts.

We heard French President Sarkozy speaking in New York recently, and before that, the head of the IMF at the Aid Effectiveness review in Accra, saying that the G7/8 should be expanded to bring in new members that have emerged as powerful developing countries and hence important players in global governance. Even if they bring in four or five more members, the G7/8 will remain a very exclusive club. It is not accountable, it has no transparent mechanisms and its mandate limits it to a very managerial approach. Women's networks and other social movements prefer that discussions and decisions taking place in the G7/8 should instead be moved to the UN which is a more inclusive and democratic platforms. There is no 'one size fits all' response to the financial crisis. The Women's Working Group on FfD is saying on the one hand, that we advocate for inclusive processes at the global arena, to bring in new mechanisms, new social contracts and new players. But on the other hand, we are also saying that alternative regionalisms and formations that move away from mainstream singular political and economic frameworks have to be generated and supported. Domestic policies will have to become more heterodox and not only address growth imperatives but equally address social protection and redistribution, including re-instituting in its legal norms the social obligations of private capital.

Discussion panel

Gigi said we should examine processes in other countries outside of the European Union on how to get more women into parliament and to understand how gender quotas are/are not working in different political systems and cultures. For example, in Vietnam the women's machinery which was perceived as an imposition from donors never got to be effective in promoting women's political interests and was eventually abandoned. Instead it was the traditional political influence of the Women's Union that enabled women's political leadership within the parliament. There are also examples of grassroots processes in Bolivia and Venezuela where new women political leaders are rising up as a result of more democratic processes and not because there were quotas to be filled. In regard to the way that the women's movements engages with businesses she considered that looking at the legal, regulatory frameworks and the functioning of companies was important but not in isolation from social policies and political freedoms. She felt that a big problem in the past few years was the compartmentalisation and fragmentation of the women's movements and the way it engages with power influence and monies overall.

FINAL PANEL WISE WOMEN

Gigi Francisco, (Development Alternatives with Women for the New Era, Philippines) thought that during the conference there had been some good exchanges of political ideas emerging on the contextual side North-South-East, but there was never enough time for thinking. She felt that at other WIDE conferences interactive approaches had been more successful than they had at this one, and that interactive processes on feminist subjects are worthwhile having. Speaking from the heart, she had felt a yearning in the conference discussions to interconnect and move more explicitly as a social movement, as feminist actors. At the same time she felt a dilemma as to what it is to be a social movement, whose members share a social critique as well as a political processes and visions. We want to look at ourselves and interact, but Gigi was not sure whether we really do constitute a movement, even if there is a feeling of wanting to be one. A social movement is not just about taking care of ourselves but also taking care of the social collective as an alternative vision & process. She was reminded of an old Persian saying: the young walk with their heads looking up to the sky, because they are looking for a vision, but the old walk with their heads looking at the ground because they look at their footprints and this sentiment, she felt, is what is demanded of us as feminist political subjects and of our social movement.