

# DAWN INFORMS

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era



DAWA

*"This issue of DAWN Informs mainly consists of contributions from young feminists, including DTI graduates. Alejandra Scampini, Salma Maoulidi and Unoma Madunagu contributed original articles, and we include an excerpt from Defending Our Dreams: Global Feminist Voices for a New Generation (AWID, Zed Books 2006), the exciting anthology of writings by young feminists which Shamillah Wilson and Anasuya Sengupta co-edited (with Kristy Evans). Latin American DTI participants in the regional follow up training course in Chile assisted in the elaboration of a report on the Women and Power in Politics forum and the training programme that followed it."*

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## Latin America and the Caribbean An Appeal to Reclaim the UN and UN Reform

*Alejandra Scampini, ACTION AID International Americas*

There are many ways in which we could look at the UN and UN processes and what they mean for, and in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the present time, however, these reflections are permeated by feelings of frustration, uncertainty and challenge, and disturbed by a myriad of questions around the validity and efficacy of our practices, actions and political discourses as women and feminist activists in the region. Some of those self-critical questions include asking ourselves what we have invested over the past 20 years; how many of our objectives or gains we have achieved; what limitations and obstacles we have come up against; and questions about the efficacy and efficiency of gender mainstreaming, gender mechanisms, women's offices, gender bureaux, women in politics, and so forth.

### The Regional Context

These questions are, of course, embedded in a complex geopolitical, global and regional scenario. Therefore, any valid reflection needs to take stock of some of the important changes that have taken place in our region.

Two main ones stand out: As Virginia Vargas commented on a panel at the World Social Forum in Caracas 2006, today

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there is a "new democratic wave" in the region, albeit a wave bringing in very heterogeneous democracies ranging from one focused on struggle against the neo-liberal model and the Bush administration (Venezuela) to more moderate versions (Chile, Brazil). Evo Morales' triumph in Bolivia has meant that indigenous peoples have assumed political power for the first time and been given a chance to recover their culture, while Michelle Bachelet's presidency in Chile contributes significantly to this new democratic wave with a component that has been absent or weakly expressed in our societies: women are political subjects, with proposals and clear demands for democracy.

The second important change relates to social movements, which are key players in providing opportunities for women's rights activism and advocacy in the region and at the global level. While these movements today remain strong and dynamic, in spite of attempts at cooptation and repression, almost every movement is having deep debates about its strategies. Something new is emerging, although we're not yet sure about its nature. One positive force is growth in the movements' self-esteem: they are prepared for long-term struggle and their strategies seem ready to modify once again the regional scenario.

The Latin American and Caribbean women's movement has emerged as powerful political constituency and become an increasingly important part of the social movement for global justice. Despite a period of positive policy outcomes, the struggle to

achieve gender equality and women's human rights continues. Every time administrations change, laws are reconsidered, and quite often the fight for gender equality has to start again almost from scratch. Yet women in the region as all over the world are still stubbornly sustaining their advocacy and monitoring work. Real changes certainly would not have occurred if women's organizations had not invested in advocacy, monitoring and sometimes more radical forms of pressure.

### Is the UN Still Relevant?

The UN Conferences of the 1990s enabled women to gain knowledge and learn from each other's experiences. They facilitated the organization of joint projects and collaborative efforts. They gave birth to issue-based networks, which in turn provided

the research and analytical capacity that served to empower women's advocacy. It was also through this cycle of conferences that we gradually started including voices of women from different backgrounds rural, indigenous, black, lesbian and young women in national, regional and international processes. However, the UN seemed to open up more to social movements at the very time that it started to lose political power, and that national governments especially the US began to withdraw their support. The erosion of the policy-making, rights-setting role and significance of the UN also has implications for national level advocacy, which is confronted with an evident decline in governments' political commitment to

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implement or continue to defend in international arenas agreements they have already signed and committed to. Recent geopolitical re-alignments have transformed what was complex, but essentially effective, space for women's rights advocacy into "new chaotic space of contestation" that has prompted discussions about its continuing validity. Many feminist activists are asking themselves whether we are advancing or simply legitimating process, and staying put in the same place. There are some reservations about how much of their energies women's movements should direct at the global level of interaction with the UN. Getting more gender language into flawed documents may not be a victory.

Activists from Latin America in particular have highlighted the diverse implications of the very meaning given to politics today, which is related both to the broader world order and to region-specific developments. They see politics as "not about seeking to satisfy the needs of the people, of the majority of the population, but as basically conditioned by private interests, especially those interests linked to capital or to political interests beyond national borders". This has led to a discrediting of institutional politics in general. Other voices from the region have stressed the fact that, despite the constraints imposed by political and economic globalization, regional and national contexts may currently offer more 'breathing space' for women's rights advocacy than global ones. One example is the rise of progressive governments in a number of Latin American countries mentioned earlier, which raises the prospect of greater regional integration and heightens social movements' expectations with respect to the fight against poverty and the exercise of sexual and reproductive

rights. There is also a growing number of gender-aware women in positions of power who may be able to facilitate advocacy on behalf of women (though some Latin American activists complain that the efforts of feminist movements in providing support, training and leadership capacity-building for such women have not really paid off).

### How Should Women Engage with the UN?

While regional political and social contexts have pushed other issues to the forefront of women's movements' advocacy agendas in Latin America and the Caribbean, many of these issues could be successfully linked to the UN Reform debate. Maybe we as women advocates need to refocus on what the regional opportunities are to 're-link' our advocacy to the UN and promote the recasting of the women's rights discourse in the UN. However, a discussion around UN Reform specifically what reform, why and which agencies, programmes and strategies to reform cannot take place for women in the region, as well as globally, if we do not first review our advocacy strategies for engaging the organization. There is no point in buying into a new global agenda if there is no assessment on what we did wrong, what was successful, and why. Secondly, UN Reform debates cannot take place in isolation from what is happening in the global and regional contexts. Thirdly, there is both a political and technical debate about UN Reform, but the divide between these debates, which are dealt with separately, is enormous. A group of women from the women's global movement is following the conversations on UN Reform as they link to the issues of Security Council reform, reform of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), NGO participation and other



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aspects of the broader UN Reform package; yet, they have not so far found the language to indicate to women's activists on the ground what all that broad and theoretical global discourse means for those of us working at the regional and local levels. Creative new efforts are needed to 'translate' these debates to recapture the attention of women working at these levels and to include them in these processes as early and as comprehensively as possible. It would be very detrimental to the movement if we do not tackle this challenge and allow ourselves to be divided, with experts and lawyers on one side of the political debate around UN Reform and activists on the other.

At the same time, my personal sense is that there is a heavy political debate that needs to be waged first in a regional context before it can transfer to and happen at the global level. Spaces for this debate need to be created. Women activists and feminists need time to stop and assess, to have "Pause for Thought". If we enter into the UN Reform debate without listening to and linking it to these reflection processes, we will be fragmenting ourselves and seeing only one part of the scenario. So, in this context of change, what role should feminist strategies assign to international, multilateral spaces such as the UN - and to national spaces, representing the States, respectively? The unfocused advocacy strategies of the 1990s were successful owing in large part to the fact that structures for participation and for seizing opportunities had opened up simultaneously at the UN and in countries with commitment to democracy. Their success also owed much to feminist movements' capacity to organize and formulate proposals.

However, those structures no

longer exist. The closed process leading up to the Millennium Review Summit in 2005 was a clear reminder of the difficulties and exclusionary practices at the UN. Today, women have come to see that any advocacy practice or negotiation strategy has its limits in this era of neo-liberal hegemony, insolent and arbitrary US primacy, and growing conservative and fundamentalist trends. They have to consider the impact that all this has had in terms of undermining the UN and making it an almost obsolete space from which to promote change. Is it possible to advocate successfully for women's rights within an institution vis-à-vis which the only valid demand is that it has to be, not reformed, but re-founded, rebuilt from scratch? Is it possible to build more equal and diverse world, based on freedoms, social justice and respect for other human beings? Are we women capable of putting forward comprehensive proposals for the whole of society with a gender perspective? These are just a few examples of the questions that we have to confront if we want to address the UN and its value and validity in women's advocacy strategies.

**N**eo-liberalism, which is behind the re-orientation of states within UN processes so as to better serve the interests of capital, weakens the state's traditional role as mediator of social conflict and also modifies the contents of its democratisation. Any attempt to think of what kind of UN we want, what areas we should consider more important than others, has to be done in the light of these state reforms and the intra-State decentralization processes that are underway. If we avoid these conversations, we would be narrowing the debate round UN and UN Reform to technical issues and expert conversations that are not translated

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into local and national realities. It is in the local and national realm where the language of UN documents needs to be implemented.

And, more than ever, the UN is a crucial space for fighting unilateralism and the power of corporations. We believe the UN has a unique and valuable role, not only to create rules at the multilateral level but also to be a shield, for both women and men, against voracious capitalism and hegemonic political and economic power. So let's not give up on the UN; let's engage as women and feminists, but critically. One key question posed by Zo Randriamaro, a Madagascan activist, in one of her publications is that, in order to evaluate the UN, we should consider where global governance and "we the people" would be without it. Furthermore, as women and their organizations face new and ever more daunting challenges today, it is vital to build on the achievements and assets accumulated in several decades of feminist activism at the UN. Certainly, we can make substantial contributions in terms of making the UN more effective.

## **Regional Women's**


### **Recommendations for UN Reform**

We want to strengthen the idea that the UN remains an important multilateral institution for the establishment of rules and the construction of consensus, and we have to work jointly for the UN to retain this element. We feel the UN's multilateralism should be further developed as therein lies the real power to fulfil international conventions and resolutions. The UN as an organization cannot find the solution in an isolated manner. We have to do this jointly, and to this end we need, among other things, to broaden and strengthen civil society's participation. As Lydia Alpizar, Mexican feminist and

representative for the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) from the region noted, "without us, the peoples" the UN is nothing but an empty shell. A UN like this does not work for us, does not belong to us; it is contaminated by political and economic interests that do not allow it to develop the mission for which it was created. We must recover that mission. Thus, we need changes in terms of how, for what reason, and for whom, the UN functions. We must review and debate structures, functions and power dynamics at the UN with the active participation of civil society, as part of its vision and mandate. Only then we will have a UN more credible and capable of serving justice and global democracy.

One of the best mechanisms for a more effective UN could be consultative status for NGOs in the General Assembly. Our participation should not be limited to special invitations; we have to create a permanent mechanism for influencing resolutions as well as commissions. With regard to the Security Council, we advocate that its discussions should include stakeholders beyond the Member States and encompass broader themes such as democratization, transparency and accountability in the decision-making process, as well as generating spaces for dialogue and consultation with civil society. There should be a formal permanent mechanism that would allow civil society to help build and implement the concept of human security that includes women's security in the public and private spheres. ECOSOC should be reinforced and its status elevated; ultimately, it should serve as a forum on development cooperation to which the International Financial Institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) are subordinated and accountable.

Finally, we as women's groups and activists know that change is possible from within the UN. We reclaim our UN as a crucial forum we helped to develop. To this end, we will have to continue to involve ourselves in its mechanisms in order to determine the how, the ultimate direction and the reasons for the changes as part of a wider UN Reform process. We call on women's groups and feminist movements, in our region and globally, to work together to create the time and space needed for this involvement to be effective.

*(From a book launched by GEO-ICAE and REPEM in 2006, sub-titled 'Lessons learnt and ways forward for women's human rights advocacy').* 



# The Digital GAP, Gender and Development: Review and Recommendations in Relation to WSIS

*KnowHow Conference 2006, México, 21-26 August, 2006*

*Panel presentation by Anita Gurumurthy, based on a joint conference proposal by Heike Jensen, Magaly Pazello and Anita Gurumurthy*

## 1. How do we see feminism respond to ICTs and information society (IS) issues?

**A**n important dimension of the Information Society is that it is reconstituting social relationships. This is occurring along a spectrum. First, at individual levels, it impacts women's identities. Researchers in Islamic societies have written about the new identities emerging with the new publics. Similarly, the fact that 50% of internet users in India are from the lower middle class is a powerful indicator of how technology is mediating identity and social mores. Consider also for instance, how mobile telephony in small towns in countries like India negotiates the constraints associated with classical notions of mobility and space. These phenomena are more powerful than we can fathom in terms of the 'cracks' that are happening in social stratification and particularly, what it means for gender.

Something seems to be happening out there to gendered rules and this concerns what may be broadly captured in the notion of "degrees of freedom". This also includes how spaces are being breached, expanded, transcended and claimed. I would think this pertains to women's own attitudes to pornography, their sexuality and sexual identity, much more than we realize. The virtual space is rehashing real relationships and our semantics

don't capture it enough.

The other end of the spectrum is the manner in which women's location within institutional arrangements is changing. For instance, the notion of women's citizenship within the Information Society age, and what intangible information and knowledge resources mean for women's rights as citizens. Even less theorised are the changes to governance and to exercising the right to information, all of which hold revolutionary possibilities for marginalized women. In most developing countries where the political system thrives on an exchange of favours, IS possibilities hit at the heart of this kind of institutional exclusion of women. Now it is possible to envisage a rightful assertion of entitlements based on online information.

And finally, in the middle of this spectrum is the whole set of new networks and the emerging meanings of alliances.

## 2. What did WSIS achieve?

The WSIS brought in a public policy orientation to the IS discourse. And this was really critical since the realm of social policy is fundamental to gender. WSIS created a stake for different CS actors including feminists at global levels and this kind of discursive spaces are really important for feminism.



In this sense, WSIS was really the first basis for a democratic public discourse on the IS. Until the WSIS we had a completely Northern conception of the IS, which varied in its hues from being patronizing to being extremely offensive.

In 2001 for example, the chairman of the US Federal Communication Commission (the US telecom regulator) said the following: "the 'digital divide' is 'a dangerous phrase' because it can be used to justify government programs that guarantee poor people cheaper access to new technology..." "I think there's a Mercedes divide, -- I'd like to have one, but I can't afford one."

This aspect assumes significance if we go back to how, prior to the WSIS, the IS issue was sought to be kept unencumbered by policy frameworks and things on the ground were led mainly by the Dot Force recommendations which conferred to the global South, the template of an IS. This was basically a market-oriented formula unabashedly handed down as policy advice. For years, UNESCO had been proposing a New World Information and Communication order, but the ITU wrested this space in an emerging global scenario of the market-led telecommunications revolution.

So till WSIS, most developing countries took what came their way in the form of capacity building, technology fixes, etc. But after the financing related prepcom, the bluff was called, and it became clear that there was no global commitment to look at IS issues within public policy

frameworks.

### What did WSIS not achieve?

Even though WSIS was really cast in a classical global governance mould which as the mould that captures the fight against market fundamentalism and the political rights of the marginalized is not unfamiliar to women the alliances between CS and developing countries were not at all strong.

The neo-liberal influence was so strong that from the Declaration of Principles to the POA and from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Summits, there was a complete loss of vision, and the official actors felt very uneasy to look at gender issues.

One of the main issues with the WSIS was that it failed to transcend the self-defeating hierarchies between civil-political and socio-economic rights. In

other words, the political rights of men and women were asserted strongly, but the socioeconomic aspects of the agenda on the table for instance, IG were not taken up at all. WSIS did not invoke the right to development powerfully enough (a right that women have invoked so often). Even among those from developing countries who did stand by the necessary socio-economic basis of equity in the IS, gender justice was not a priority. Volunteerism, rather than public interest and public financing, was being spoken of in the discussion on financing. The WSIS was therefore not a summit that threw up clear alternatives; rather it was based

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on reactive and even cooptive politics.

The failure for feminism was at many levels. Part of the problem is that women's history is a story of counterculture; one of posing to the world a perspective that challenges the male-centred view. Here in the IS context, we were facing the tough challenge of an underdeveloped discourse and of clearly painting the feminine face of the IS and its hegemonies, let alone being able to talk about the new spaces for feminist emancipatory ideals. And I believe this task of unpacking, both for political actors to see and to understand is really necessary.

Take for instance the question of access we argued for equal access for women, but did not argue as much about the worldview into which our access was being fitted. Poor women do need access but on what terms, and for what purposes. Should we go with the miraculous goodies of MNCs that thrive on rent seeking, that capture the governments of poor countries into running 'public' programs for women, and the marginalized, and ostensibly for bringing about transparency through e-governance? There is a huge paradox here, and a striking parallel to women's participation in political spaces. We have always asserted that women cannot join political structures unless these structures are cleaned up; clearly our task on unpacking 'access' to ICTs still remains.

For a world exposed to the subterfuge of free trade it is clearly evident that pro-market policy regimes, do not favour developing countries. Further, they do not favour women. There is no point in taking connectivity to Africa if

we cannot address the fundamental grievousness of dominant IP regimes, and how we as women see such a shrinking public domain as an essential IS issue that requires us to draw up the basic rules of the IS.

### 3. What remains priority for action?

First I think is to understand the animal. This we have not done well enough. It's a bit like the story of the elephant and the blind men each of us is able to see different dimensions of the IS. While action can be focused, our analysis cannot be fragmented. So even as we may understand collaboration in its new meanings within open paradigms, or take on access to

knowledge issues from a feminist perspective, or work on networking tools or on field-based initiatives, the political content of the IS needs to be understood.

For instance, what is the point in arguing that the quality of

public health institutions is to be improved, unless we also address the reduced spending or cutbacks in health budgets? Similarly, with respect to the IS, architecture is policy and code is law. Unless we challenge and rebuild from the root, we cannot shape what we want.

The urgency is to bring in a framework at global levels that sets the contexts of the ethical dimension of the IS we seek to establish. I would like to share with you an important and not well known aspect of the Global Alliance on ICTs for Development. The Global Alliance was approved by the Secretary General of the

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UN in April of this year. The mission of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development was articulated through a press release - "The mission will be to facilitate and promote the integration of ICTs to development activities by providing a platform for an open, inclusive, multi-stakeholder cross-sectoral policy dialogue on the role of information and communication technology in development."

**T**he Global Alliance had its first meeting in May and all the output documents of this meeting, including the modalities document that speaks about the future approach are completely silent on the policy dialogue that was emphasized by the Secretary General. The document mostly speaks about 'best practices' exchanges. The crisis for us is that the contours of engagement of the various actors in the IS where the private sector comes in, what rights CS has, how states need to honour rights - requires to be defined by social policy and at the moment there seems to be a policy vacuum.

Also, not all emerging issues are completely known and understood. Within the current scheme of things, we are addressing many IS issues in a fragmented way, dealing with e-commerce in WTO, and something else in WIPO, but has its own limitations. For instance, content concerns a gamut of things that is linked to the Internet's governance architecture. So we are not just talking about multilingualism, but pornography, hate speech, freedom of expression, etc. Each of these has highly contextual meanings, are highly theorised and are all subjects of global social policy. But we are just beginning to fathom how the virtual space changes these domains. How do we, for instance, balance security and privacy considerations?

The WSIS folded up without a clear mandate for policy spaces to address IS issues, and the UN was seen as inappropriate for anchoring any post-WSIS mechanism. The Global Alliance talks about business plans; and so we need to wait and watch how policy responses emerge in the post-WSIS scenario.

Obviously, we need to be alert to the political economy aspects of the policy spaces. While the EU meets twice a year on IS issues and requires acceding nations to have an information society body, it does not think it necessary for a global policy space on IS that can apply to all countries. And this is simply because of the predominance of business interests.

So the main agenda for women is to be able to get into, and push for a dialogue about basic principles governing the IS.

#### **4. What political arenas are crucial for feminist action?**

I think all of us agree that nation-states as socio-political systems are really challenged and stretched. And we do need political innovations. However, putting our weight behind multistakeholder structures need us to think hard on three dimensions.

1. That we do not end up having to hand over on a platter all those rights that women have fought for and won decades in the discussions that involve actors whom we are clearly opposed to. Imagine sitting with Rupert Murdoch on the same table and trying to push feminist agenda! In our fascination for the form, we may end up sacrificing substance, and this is a real danger, and I see this everywhere, from national policy structures to global ones.

2. While I do think alternate systems are necessary, non-government forums cannot deliver, especially if



we are talking about rights and an implied notion, therefore, of obligations and contracts. Till such time that we are able to enforce accountabilities differently, the nation-state will be a problematic but nevertheless real and consequential actor. We do not want to purge the role of governments and have it replaced with a toothless anarchy. Vacuums are more dangerous, I believe, because the powers that be simply flow into these spaces and usurp them. This is loud and clear in the way in which Internet-related debates are simply eluding poor countries. Historically, we see that where the state was pushed aside in developing countries and the multilaterals were brought in to redesign economics, they ran amuck and destroyed societies beyond repair. I am not statist but I am against alternatives that undermine the political legitimacy of states.


3. I also think there is one more thing to multistakeholderism - the idea that one state is better than another; that 'progressive' governments are superior within multi-stakeholder spaces than 'retrograde' ones. I think that those who have been part of political movements and politics know that these categories of good and bad are rather inapplicable when it comes to the political arena. Not having a repressive state within a forum may seem to make discussions 'easy', but excluding some states is a huge problem. Such discussions completely lack the cultural and political representativeness that lends legitimacy to global decisions. If representativeness is sacrificed, we will end up more and more with elite clubs

in the name of policy spaces that take us nowhere.

I want to also point to the danger that the upcoming IGF can end up becoming a club. Without keeping the political content and global governance aspects of the Internet alive, we will allow the IGF meeting to go by and implicitly endorse the highly iniquitous basis of its current governance. Not a single developing country has put out a proposal for IGF even as the end date for submission of proposals is almost over. We may end up discussing security, spam, etc., and go back home without understanding that there are big political issues out there that need to be understood.

I am disturbed that our quest for multistakeholderism is leading us to situations that are giving birth to a new monster - much more savage than our old, oppressive and "failed" structures.

The legitimization of the private sector on the policy discussion table is worrisome. In sustainable development circles, I know of NGOs who will fight to death the invasion of policy spaces by corporate interests. From Monsanto seeds, to Coke, to spurious drugs, there are innumerable examples of such resistance. Do you think health NGOs will ever allow pharmaceuticals to sit on the same table and discuss health policy at the WHO? Why then are we allowing the private sector to do so in IS spaces? While I think there is a big role for business in human life, I do not subscribe to the view that business interests are capable of shaping social policy for public good. And I fear that in our search for multi-stakeholderism, we are behaving like the ostrich, - being unable to see how our demands for inclusion are being coopted into so-called win-win solutions that actually leave us more crippled.

I think that a silver lining for developing countries has been the recent collapse of the Doha round of trade talks. The new alliances in the discussions and the stances taken by a group of developing countries against the US in particular, really go to the heart of the matter., which is of geopolitics and US hegemony. The capacity of governments in developing countries needs to be built to decode the politics in the IS arena as well. 



# WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

By Unoma Madunagu  
DTI 2005

**H**IV/AIDS is an acronym standing for Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Tabifor .H. (2002) defines AIDS as a combination of diseases affecting a person whose defence mechanism has become so weak that it can no longer fight them off. According to the United Nations (UN) Secretary General, Kofi Annan, on the World AIDS Day in December 1, 2003, Sub-Saharan Africa remains the worst affected region with 28.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS, 21.8 million cumulative AIDS deaths, and 3 - 3.4 million new infections in 2003. Women alone account for more than half of the people living with the disease.

The alarming increase in the rate of HIV infections from 1986, when the first case of HIV/AIDS was officially reported in Nigeria, in a 13-year old girl, to the present date, is an indicator that everyone should be part of the fight against HIV/AIDS from the

community level up to the national level. It is important to acknowledge the fact that there are wonderful programmes that have been designed by the Nigerian Government, Non-governmental Organisation (NGOs) and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) to prevent the spread of AIDS and reduce new infections. However, individuals need to

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be part of the fight and not wait for programmes from government and other organisations.

This opinion is drawn from

my experience and my observations of the activities of the rural women who live in the community where I am presently carrying out my National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) primary assignment in Ujiogba community in Edo State of Nigeria. The role of women is essential because, apart from being the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) because of physiological factors, economic needs, lack of job

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opportunities, poor access to education and training, and cultural expectations of female submissiveness and male dominance, they constitute a very active part of the community, they form women groups that are really very strong and effective. If HIV/AIDS prevention activities are designed and incorporated in their activities it may reduce the risk of women to new HIV/AIDS infection.

Women living in rural communities fall under different categories such as women infected and living with HIV/AIDS and others not infected, but affected as well as women who are economically empowered and those who are not, educated and non-educated women, etc. These different categories of women can be equipped to source for the information they need and given skills on how to discuss their specific needs. By empowering themselves first, women can then reach out to others to create impact in their communities. Encouraging the different groups to work together in small groups will enable the shy ones living with HIV/AIDS to feel

comfortable about expressing their needs. Creating safe spaces through confidentiality is vital to ensuring that all needs are brought on board so that there can be a focus on where to lay emphasis in planning development programmes to address their different needs. If these approaches are taken, the women will have a sense of belonging and purpose, and become aware of the problems, and

**W**omen who are economically independent can help others through micro-credit schemes to reduce the economic dependency of other women and create job opportunities. This can go a long way to reduce the sexual exploitation of women.

make conscious efforts to address them. This may be more effective than spoon-feeding approaches.

In addition, these groups should be autonomous to give women full authority over their own programmes.

Secondly, because women are seen as care givers in their community and play a major role in taking care of the sick members of their community, it would be possible for them to carry out these roles without being judgmental and prejudiced, if they are trained to. This is to encourage HIV/AIDS patients to be more open in discussing AIDS and to seek ways of coping with the disease positively, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to feel loved and cared for and also be determined to work with others. Women who are economically independent can help others through micro-credit schemes to reduce the economic dependency of other women and create job opportunities. This can go a long way



# The DOHA negotiations: What is really at stake?

By Gigi Francisco, DAWN South East Asia Regional Coordinator

Presented at the FES/WTO Asia Regional Dialogue on "WTO at the Cross-Roads: Experiences and Expectations Around the Doha Agenda," Singapore, 30-31 October, 2006

## Is it the DDA, WTO or what?

**D**espite public announcements by trade negotiators that they do not see the talks resuming soon, there is a frenzy of activities and consultations around the need to save the stalled multilateral trade negotiations and to secure the place of the WTO in global governance. As well, despite public announcements from the WTO secretariat and trade negotiators on the need to use the stalled talks for reflection, there is less effort expended on examining how to really make the DDA or trade


liberalization for that matter genuinely spur development for many poor countries and poor peoples in rich countries. The reflection so far is limited to what are the current bottlenecks and on what gains countries are willing or not willing to go away with. Some of us in this room, for instance, are insisting that we strategically examine existing bottlenecks as products of undelivered promises of the Uruguay Round. But I also feel that this perspective does not sit well with others among us who are more concerned with moving the negotiations forward within what they

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to reduce the sexual exploitation of women. Monthly discussions at schools and market days allow entry points for working with women living with HIV/AIDS. Market day is the most important day for the community and most members are present. Creative methodologies could be employed to attract people, such as a drama or skit.

Finally, women support groups should demand decision-making positions in the community so that their

interests can be protected. Their male counterparts should not be left out because they need to provide support to the women but they should not be key players so as not to dominate the activities of the women. To conclude, in fighting the scourge of HIV/AIDS, it should be recognised that rural women are very important stakeholders, as well as those saddled with responsibility for training younger people. Their involvement can bring about a positive change and help reduce the HIV/AIDS scourge in our society. 



also see is a limited time for doing so! They would prefer, I believe, to focus on deal making in the here and now, as a matter of urgency.

**H**ence, the pressure seems to be focused on getting developing countries back to the Geneva negotiating forum as if it was their intransigence much more than that of the EU and the US that had caused the round to collapse. A tense and stalemated situation on the multilateral trade front is certainly on us, at the center of which are undelivered promises in, and disagreements around a global agricultural deal and now tangled up in the so-called triangle of issues.

Showing no political will to address the bottleneck, both the US and the EU have launched more aggressive bilateral negotiations around free trade agreements where WTO Plus concessions are being extracted. Other developed countries like Japan, Singapore, Australia have also started their own FTAs. This shift to WTO Plus bilateral, plurilateral and regional FTAs/RTAs is part of a deliberate move by liberalizers to shift the debate away

from issues that are important to developing countries (such as Domestic Support) and toward the issue of market access for business firms. The EU now has a new more ambitious trade policy (Global Europe) and the US admits that a resumption of talks would benefit its express delivery providers, banks and telecommunications services (Bloomberg Oct 10 2006). Both want a major push toward a self-regulating global market that private investors and business firms play an active role in.

*Showing no political will to address the bottleneck, both the US and the EU have launched more aggressive bilateral negotiations around free trade agreements where WTO Plus concessions are being extracted.*

**B**ilateral FTAs and RTAs have always been there as these are coherent with the overall WTO agenda, in fact, they provide important building blocks for a global free market.

Developed countries will use bilaterals whenever it is convenient for them. The fact that they are doing so now does not mean that they haven't used this as an instrument in the past when the WTO talks were still progressing albeit perhaps not in the pace that liberalizers would want it to be. Just like the collapse of the MTS talks, we cannot say the emergence of FTAs happened overnight we could see it coming, too!

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The point is: it is erroneous to pit the WTO with bilateral FTAs because in essence they are one and the same. They could co-exist and are co-existing. They are instruments of the same agenda.

**I**n light of continuing assaults on market access, what developing governments and social actors can do is to persist in safeguarding the interests of food security, rural development and small farmers in the poorer regions of the world whether in the multilateral or bilateral fronts. Keeping the ordinary people's interests in a trade agenda of the WTO is already an extremely limited governmental commitment to the majority of the world's people who are rural citizens and small farmers. Giving it up would certainly move trade talks faster and deeper but it will also lead to disastrous consequences for the poor, many of whom are women, in many economies. The process of trade intensification in the global market cannot be drawn simply by the demands for market access by a few global players. For developing markets and newly emerged strong economies that are experiencing high levels of poverty, this means rapid and deep tariff cuts and immediate and full loss of domestic regulation space. The current impasse reflects

these major threats and risks of many countries and societies, hence, the fight over the rules and the need for Lamy to propose putting the brakes on the talks.

**Other than insisting that talks resume, what else can we do?**

The stalled talks should provide governments and social actors with the opportunity to reflect more deeply on how to reverse the current emphasis on the requisites of free trade / market access to one in which trade is framed and tamed by the demands of rights and development. Papers such as the one on the role of SPs produced by Ivanic and Martin of the World Bank certainly do not help move the paradigm toward this direction. And rather than go for deals that are simply possible and practicable but which reflects a compact of unequal power relations and iniquitous distribution of resources and tensions or fragile consensus, governments of developing countries should fight tooth and nail at the trade negotiating table, for the social construction of a global market in which social and human rights are positioned above commercial rights.

We need to listen to the broader range of vital interests, not just to the interests of powerful industrial, service and finance corporations that have captured state power. "We" means not just the WTO and similar multilateral institutions but governments of both

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developed and developing countries. One of these voices is that of feminist economists who for the longest time have persisted in examining, deliberating and promoting the social reproduction challenge to a free trade regime. There are also a range of heterodox economists who see more viability in a 'mix of policies' in which government regulation and intervention has a role to play. Rather than be conditioned to think that "free trade is failing the poor because there is not enough of it," we should be looking more seriously at what Nancy Folbre (1994) had called Imperfectly Rational, Somewhat Economic Persons or Institutions "agents (that) pursue their self-interest in ways not neatly adjusting to clear-cut definitions economic rationality and 'selfishness' often leading, for example, to complex mixtures of behavior from solidarity to competition or from altruism to selfishness that are difficult to model even if they are more realistic" (Beneria 2003 p. 68).

This perceived complexity in the behavior of economic actors demands that we also have a complex of trade rules rather than a one size fits all set of

*This perceived complexity in the behavior of economic actors demands that we also have a complex of trade rules rather than a one size fits all set of rules whose basis reflects a compact of inequalities and which severely penalizes anyone who is unable to cope.*

rules whose basis reflects a compact of inequalities and which severely penalizes anyone who is unable to cope. Further that such complex of trade rules whether regional plurilateral or bilateral or whatever form of preferential arrangements or economic partnerships can be framed by an overarching rights and development set of rules whose

acceptance is more universal and less controversial (although there are controversies here as well). What I am saying therefore is that the WTO if it were to remain a trade governance institution of one

form or another, will have to thread under the UN Human Rights Council, for instance (and not just to work with them!) Coherence must be around rights; the existing Coherence Policy of the WTO-WB-IMF is a narrow programmatic and not an ethical framework for humanity. Nussbaum (2004) pursues the question of global justice by recommending a set of duties to various global structures that would guarantee humanity with a minimum set of capabilities and entitlements.

I also would like to take issue with

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the assertion made by friends that without the WTO the environment will be more uncomfortable for smaller economies. Certainly a regional grouping wherein smaller economies are linked up with a developed economy within a comfortable territorial proximity is more comforting for the former (ASEAN +3 or +6 is a grouping that can be explored). The emergence of strong markets has certainly made this constellation of relations more feasible than it was in the past.

At the sphere of regional, sub-regional and other plurilateral forms, the socialization of a new political subject that is less dependent on a distorted sense of nationalism which is of late a product of reaction against economic globalization and unilateral war, will be supported by new processes and mechanisms. In this light, I am not going to press the red button on nationalism and survival of the fittest if and when the talks do not resume as some of our

friends do.

Having said this, I must say that the alternative of regionals or sub-regionals is also quite problematic. To begin with most FTAs and RTAs that are being pursued everywhere hinge on WTO Plus commitments. We can of course imagine regional agreements as not just WTO Plus; it could also be Rights Plus. Or why couldn't the WTO Plus also mean moving past the current WTO rules not in the arena of liberalization and market access but in the arenas of SPs, SSMs and S&Ds? Let's get real though we cannot expect this of our government

*Civil society organizations have a major role to play, in terms of active citizens actions and claims on governments to be more accountable to the poor when they enter any trade or broader economic agreements.*

negotiators. And it is here where social movements and civil society organizations have a major role to play, in terms of active citizens actions and claims on governments to be more accountable to the poor when they enter any trade or broader economic agreements. Subjecting economic agreements to ratification by parliament should also be supported. In brief, strengthening democratic governance to regulate trade so as to ensure that trade works for a country's poor is a prerequisite of a real alternative. It is not an outcome of more liberalization as the experience in Asia shows. 🌅



# WHAT DO WOMEN STAND TO GAIN FROM TRADE?

*Salma Maoulidi*

*Trade, trade and more trade: That's the winning formulae for economic success. But what does this mean for women in the East African region? How are their interests reflected in trading activities? Salma Maoulidi investigates.*

**T**rade signifies an assortment of economic activities and transactions. Trade, for many in the Global South struggling to improve their economic status, is the new salvation. It is the magic equation to economic prosperity - do more of it and your Gross Domestic Product (GDP) goes up, winning you points in economic performance. But like all prevailing economic formulas there is a catch: for any meaningful economic gains to be registered under the present trade regime, external trading must outweigh internal trading. In practical terms this means economies import more at the expense of local production, the latter becoming more prohibitive and less competitive on account of higher production and transaction costs. Conversely, countries fetch lower returns on exports following the devaluation of local currencies, making them too weak to trade competitively on the world market; and also because goods produced locally continue to have the inferior status of "raw materials" or unprocessed goods and are of a lesser value compared to processed goods.

## **Why sex is a factor in the trade equation?**

In simple terms, this forms the basic functioning of the current trade regime. Underneath this simplicity, however, lies a complex set of relationships that fundamentally influence the terms and players in trade deals, including women. Universally the world of business is seen to be off limits to women. Just as dominant religious and cultural ideologies persistently deny women proprietary rights, the business establishment has followed suit, recognizing more readily women's role as producers, and as consumers, but not as owners and managers of productive enterprise.

Political independence has had minimal impact on the national and global economic profile in terms of wealth distribution. During colonial times in East Africa, the trading class was composed mainly of Indians and a few Arabs, who owned the local retail and wholesale shops. The main economic activities were, however, controlled by the settler farmer and colonial administration, mostly Europeans. As corporations take over economic activities, trade monopoly is

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no longer solely defined by race and ethnicity. Thus the local Indian or Arab retailer in East Africa is being replaced by the Chinese retailer/wholesaler; while an expert labour force from India and other parts of South East Asia take over industries and the service sector. A few indigenous entrepreneurs claim a stake in local and regional business, but for the most part Africans form the bulk of the unskilled labour force and remain the primary consumers.

The sex composition in the business world has remained unchanged, with women registering little success in penetrating global, regional and local markets. Women in trade and economic bodies are still under-represented. In Tanzania, for example, women are underrepresented in virtually all business chambers. The local bourse has very few women traders as do local industries. Regional Trade Agreements offer business opportunities beyond national boundaries but are, for the most part, not integrative of the needs of women. Trade frameworks like NEPAD or the East African Common Markets, while seemingly progressive, are rendered ineffective by constitutional frameworks that preserve gender inequalities at national levels. In many respects, therefore, women remain objects of sale, convenient conduits for

furthering materialist aims and gains. They are yet to become the subject of trade regimes and investments.

### The miracle of women-friendly economic programmes

In view of the persistent exclusion of women in economic enterprise and the widespread belief that economic empowerment is critical to raising the status of women, some quarters, either pioneering individuals or development organizations, have tried to redress the imbalance of players in economic enterprise. Many implement programmes aimed at the economic uplift of women, programmes that vary minimally in approach in that they have micro-lending or micro-credit as the basis for women's economic empowerment.

The theory of women and economic uplift is, however, flawed as it does not see the woman as an independent economic investor or dealer. Indeed, whereas the imperialist business model focuses on accumulation in order to achieve profit maximization through serious capital injection, prevailing notions of women and entrepreneurship limit women's economic engagement to the micro, the small business happening outside the margins of real business.

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**E**ssentially, the very concept of micro-credit is restrictive. Other than suggesting that it is insignificant, and therefore of minimal consequence, insofar as volume and risk is concerned, it does not view women as serious accumulators of capital. Rather, the concern is to give women enough to help them and their families survive. Such an outlook has affected how women engage in business, their overwhelming motivation being aiding their families, not making serious money.

Indeed, women plough back most of the earnings and profits they get from productive activities into their families instead of expanding or diversifying their businesses (a fact a number of agencies have banked on to introduce or intensify micro-credit programmes targeting women). Because women's economic activity is mainly concerned with improving the household and family welfare it is not perceived as a serious trade venture. Perhaps if women did not assume the greater burden of caring for the household, they would dare to trade for profit as some younger unattached women do. They would vie to make money for the sake of making money, and not just for survival.

**T**he terms of engagement under which most micro lending schemes operate are also limiting in that they require women to organize in collectives - in fives or tens - to qualify for lending or credit schemes. Indubitably, it proves more profitable for lending institutions to lend money to communities of women where they can maximize their turnover irrespective of whether women are making any money

from the loans: continuous recruitment and policing of group members ensure high return rates. Hence, with very little investments women become effective mediums of cash generation and multiplication.

#### **Women as objects or subjects of trade**

In many respects, therefore, women are becoming the objects of trade. Businesses target women using both traditional as well as modern techniques. Economic liberalization has seen an influx of luxury items in Tanzania, the most significant being cosmetics. Images of the modern woman championed by the media, result in the dumping of cheap beauty products such as whitening creams, the health dimension of which is yet to be assessed. The promoters and chief distributors are men, while women are the willing or beleaguered consumers. Similarly, the home, the bastion of womanhood, remains the most effective sales point, luring women with the possibilities of stocking up on the newest and cheapest home gadgets on the market.

This is not to say that women are sitting idly by, oblivious to emerging economic opportunities under traditional and new trade regimes. Women may have been excluded from active trade but they have never shied away from trade. Indeed, in a number of African countries women are revered for their trading skills. For example, food and textile markets in West Africa are dominated by women. It is now customary, even in conservative areas, to see women traders - women running shops and bars in urban and provincial centres; women fish vendors in coastal areas and the Great Lakes areas and

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Zanzibar; women trading in foodstuffs and cereals in Manyara and Mbeya; women hawking goods in Moshi and Arusha; and women transporters in Tanga and Dar es Salaam. There is also an increase of women participating in national and international trade fairs, many sponsoring their own participation. Increasingly women are trying to build a niche for themselves in fields previously dominated by men.

Women make up a significant percentage of the 85% of Tanzanians engaged in agriculture, the mainstay of the economy. Also they form a sizeable percentage of the self-employed population engaged in the informal sector. Because women's economic

engagement is confined to the reproductive sector - in food production or preparation, hospitality, child caring, education, beauty and hygiene, and handicrafts - areas that affirm a woman's sexual and reproductive role, they remain excluded from more lucrative productive enterprises like large-scale farming, horticulture or industry.

Even among the fastest growing sectors of the Tanzanian economy, like mining, women are under performing. Whereas there is an association of women miners representing the interest of a sizeable population of women in mines, few are miners or

dealers in gemstones or in industries associated with mining. The bulk of the female population working in mines sells food or provides sex services. Women in the tourist industry fare no better. Men dominate the most lucrative services in the sector as tour and taxi operators, travel agencies, hotel owners and managers. Women assume low ranking service jobs such as telephone operators, waitresses, chambermaids, cleaners, travel agent, sales persons, and flight attendants.

As is the case of women in the food industry, women in the tourist industry are pushed to prostitution to supplement meagre incomes.

**Economic success, but at what price for women?**

**I**ncreasing insecurity in their personal

lives may make women reluctant participants in commerce. Micr-credit programmes are replete with reports of husbands who appropriate loans or earnings, exacerbating levels of poverty among women. Similarly, little attention has been paid to the great physical risk women face on account of their economic success. Necessarily, economic success does not shield women from the threat of violence. A number of women experience acts of aggression on account of their business success. A case in point involves a popular female fish trader in Arusha market, Mama Terry, who was

**M**en dominate the most lucrative services in the sector as tour and taxi operators, travel agencies, hotel owners and managers. Women assume low ranking service jobs such as telephone operators, waitresses, chambermaids, cleaners, travel agent, sales persons, and flight attendants.

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recently robbed in her home. A close male relative jealous of her business success paid the gangsters to "fix her". Thankfully, when they attacked she had a sizeable amount of cash, in her possession. Distracted by the loot, the thugs left without harming her. Other women are not so lucky, falling victims to both sexual and physical violence after being gang robbed.

Clearly, the terms under which women can engage in productive economic activity should not surpass social expectation. Otherwise relatives and society at large reserve the right to apply some form of sanction to neutralize a woman's economic mobility.

**I**t is common for youth traders, frustrated by severe economic alienation, to physically and verbally attack women they perceive as successful. They feel such women "undermine their chances" to make it in a competitive business environment.

Sadly, models of "women of substance" in trade and business continue to be scarce, even among female business graduates. Interestingly, women with business education end up teaching or overseeing less fortunate women in micro-credit and lending programmes. Few actually venture into business. Moreover, instead of being at the forefront of an emancipatory trade and economic agenda, business professionals do very little to emancipate themselves and other women from economic bondage. Rather, they serve the dominant trade framework, becoming brokers for financial interest, urging on poor and less educated women to take on loans and subscribe to economic models

that keep them on a leash of economic dependency and exploitation.

**A** few business savvy women serve as self-appointed advocates for women's economic justice. They exercise vigilance over global processes that dictate the terms of trade for men and women in the Global South. Nevertheless, they communicate via language and process far removed from the realities of women they represent: Their discourse is too technical, aimed at policy makers and academics. Whereas these women would have provided the link between professionalism and creativity in local enterprise, or with local governments, their oppositional stance serves to alienate women further from entrepreneurship, seeing it as too complex and mystical a venture.

Ultimately, women continue to miss out on role models in the business world. They miss being groomed by women with a conceptual and practical understanding of the system. They remain confused and intimidated by the jargon and procedures that restrict their spontaneity to venture and risk. They remain ignorant of terms and processes they can take advantage of because there is little interest all round to acquaint and translate these to women. As long as women's induction to trade in the region remains microscopic, microminimized and micromanaged they will remain at the margins of trading blocs, earning just enough for their survival and that of their families. How then can such a trade development formula realistically contribute to women's economic empowerment?

*Salma Maoulidi, is the Executive Director of Sahiba's Sisters Foundation, a women's development network in Tanzania whose mission is to build women's leadership and organizational capacity. 🌻*



# REPORT ON DAWN AFRICA REGIONAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

## 17<sup>TH</sup>-24<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2006, ACCRA, GHANA

**D**AWN Africa held a very successful training of young African feminists from Anglophone and Francophone Africa in Accra, Ghana, from 17 -24 June 2006. Although this was the second such training undertaken by DAWN Africa, it was historic in that for first time Anglophone and Francophone DAWN Africa collaborated to organise a truly integrated event with full translation.

Twenty-two participants attended from 11 African countries, namely, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Guinea-Conakry, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin Republic. Due to flight difficulties, an expected participant from Eritrea was unable to attend.

Anglophone Regional Coordinator, Afua Hesse, and Francophone Regional Coordinator, Fatou Sow, coordinated the workshop and were also resource persons and facilitators. They were ably assisted by DAWN General Coordinator, Bene Madunagu, Research Coordinator on PRST, Vivienne Taylor, Dzodzi Tsikata, who has collaborated with DAWN on various researches, Shamillah Wilson, DAWN DTI liaison facilitator, and Kafui Johnson, West Africa Regional Coordinator of WILDAF, based in Togo.

Through these experienced African feminist advocates, participants were assisted in developing an understanding of the changing terrain of the struggle for gender justice in Africa. They were exposed to the ideas

and work of other activist scholars from the South and guided to examine critical issues under each of DAWN's themes in the context of current debates at the global level, and their inter-linkages with issues under other themes. The course used lectures and discussions, case study analysis and presentations, organised debates, and practical skill-building exercises in research, analysis and advocacy.

### The objectives of the training were:

- To reinforce the capacity of young African women already engaged in the women's movement and or in women's studies, to reinforce their capacity to analyse their experience in order to fully understand and improve on their advocacy; and
- To link young women and the women's movement to enable participants to network and interlink generations within DAWN Anglophone and Francophone Africa and ensure continuity of generations of women feminists

Topics were considered from a regional perspective, with the specific aim of first demystifying feminism within the Africa context and then building on the analysis. The specific topics, which covered DAWN's four major thematic areas, were:

- States, governance and democracy, including issues of citizenship, representation and the election process, militarization of the state, etc.
- The history of the global women's movement and the context of the African

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women's movement, including the processes

- Exploring African feminist identities

- The impact of social and cultural values on women and the role of the feminist within the institutions.

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights debate, including abortion and FGM

- The political economy of globalisation

- Gender and trade both at regional and international levels, including the WTO

- NEPAD and regional groupings

- African women's struggles around the African Protocol

- A research methodology workshop to equip participants with skills and tools to conduct feminist research.

Participants were allowed one half day to catch up with reading materials, produced in English and French, in the 2 volume Reader. There was also one half day allocated for a visit to the town and shopping, to give participants a break from the programme, and a dinner and cultural evening out which showcased delicious local cuisine and a taste of West African cultural dancing.

The training was judged very successful by both participants and

resource persons, whose evaluations indicated that the objectives had all been achieved, some more than others. Among the critical comments made, were debates on some important issues which were missing, and that there should have been more attention on NEPAD and regional groupings. Generally, however, participants were very pleased with the training. They found it very challenging and some said it encouraged them as young feminists. It was a great opportunity to interact



*Group photograph of participants and resource persons*

with other feminists, to increase their understanding of what was going on around Africa, and it encouraged them to continue with the struggle. It

also challenged Anglophone participants to learn French, and vice versa, in order to help break the barriers among feminists. Most participants felt recharged, re-invigorated and re-energized, while at the same time, challenged to continue keeping abreast with what was happening locally, regionally and globally. They found the whole experience exciting, especially connecting feminism and Christianity, and felt reinforced on some of the principles they held, and challenged on others, although some thought that they could have been challenged a lot more. Participants and Regional Coordinators will stay in touch through follow up networking. 🌟



# LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE: Women and power in politics

**T**he Popular Education Network Among Women from Latin America and the Caribbean (Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres REPEM), DAWN's focal point in Latin America, held the Forum, "Women and Power in Politics" in Santiago, Chile, August 10-11, 2006. The presidency of Michelle Bachelet and a cabinet with gender parity was reason enough to hold this event in Chile.

Do women exercise power in a different way than men do? Which are the obstacles for women's participation in politics? What happens when they exercise power? How is diversity addressed and how is it represented?

These were some of the questions that steered the reflections of both the panellists, who were representatives of the legislative, executive and judiciary in the region, as well as leaders of political parties, and of more than 180 representatives of women's, young women's and feminist organizations in Chile, Latin America and the Caribbean, in the event that took place in the facilities of the Chilean Ex-Congress.

## **New or old practices?**

In the Legislative Power Roundtable, Senator Margarita Percovich addressed the Uruguayan experience of the feminine bi-cameral group of parliamentarians that, beyond any political trends, fosters a common agenda for the promotion of gender equality, and reports on advances of their legislative action every year on March 8.

Elizabeth Salguero, member of the Bolivian Parliament, spoke about the difficulty she experienced when trying to make political pacts with women, and specifically with indigenous women. The Chilean parliamentarian Maria Antonieta Saa reflected upon strategies of accessing power, and referred to patronage and nepotism practices.

In the Executive Power roundtable the presence of women as heads of ministries traditionally linked with feminine roles was made evident, and essentialist standpoints about the exercise of power were questioned, such as women being less corrupt than men.

In the Judiciary Power Roundtable, Bolivian Judge Elizabeth Iñiguez expressed the view that, "... the law is not neutral, and it is not valid per se", adding that its enforcement depends on its interpretation. The panellists highlighted the importance of training and sensitising people involved in the judiciary.

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Finally, the reflections from the Roundtable on Political Parties revolved round discussing new forms of doing politics, considering the quality of the representation of new social movements, African descendents, youth, women and sexual diversity. Epsy Campbell, President of the Partido Acción Ciudadana (Citizens' Action Party) of Costa Rica, and Patricia Mercado, former candidate to the Presidency of Mexico in 2006, representing the Partido Alternativa, expressed the need to establish links with the different social sectors within a framework of transparency.

Isabel Allende, parliamentary, representative of the Chilean Socialist Party, emphasized that the media had been fundamental to Michelle Bachelet becoming a candidate to the presidency as representative of the Concertación (governing coalition), after the polls had shown the popular support she had at the time. Nonetheless, already in the Presidency, people question her way of exercising power, which contrasts with the authoritarian model of former President Lagos.

With the aim of giving continuity to the DAWN Training Institute DTI- of Bangalore, 2003 and Montevideo, 2005, a Regional Follow Up Training Course followed the Santiago Forum, from August 12-14, 2006. It was

attended by 8 DTI graduates, who were joined by 7 other young feminists. In this space, reflections revolved round the debates and discussions held during the Forum "Women and Power in Politics", deepening the knowledge acquired during the DTI training, and generating spaces for exchange and dialogue between the participants and prestigious feminists of Latin America.

*Finally, the reflections from the Roundtable on Political Parties revolved round discussing new forms of doing politics, considering the quality of the representation of new social movements, African descendents, youth, women and sexual diversity.*

From different perspectives, Patricia Mercado, Elizabeth Salguero, Ximena Machicao and Celita Echer contributed to the analysis of different experiences related to political restructuring and social transformation processes. Patricia Mercado brought forward elements of the political reform undergone by Mexico during the past ten years, and the role played by the social and feminist movements. She highlighted the new forms of political participation and citizenship that the new law recognizes as a reflection of a deep social transformation in the Mexican society, which draws from the social demand for more representation of the different social expressions - young people, indigenous movements, women, sexual diversities, among others.

Elizabeth Salguero shared her experience of the Bolivian Constituent Assembly, in which she said that the rural indigenous women's movement

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and the women's movement have failed to achieve yet a political pact to put forward a common agenda, particularly because of the mistrust resulting from the historical exclusion experienced by the indigenous people in that country.

Ximena Machicao encouraged participants to think about the need to move forward in the construction of a common project - the foundation of political pacts and the generation of solidarity bonds with those women who exercise real power, both in elective and executive positions - with the aim of achieving a political and historical accumulation of experiences, thus avoiding the dissolution of power.

Celita Eccher shared her experience as a member of the International Council of the World Social Forum, a meeting space with social movements in the quest for a world with more justice, and as a very important space for influencing, from the feminist movement.

Marta Lamas' input in the training course encouraged reflection on the links between women's sexual and reproductive rights and gender, focusing on the issue of abortion as the axis in which both issues converge as an expression of patriarchy. Furthermore, the discussion revolved

round the importance of clarifying concepts in order to build clear arguments and strategies. She recommended to take into account the political contexts and times, in order to move forward on certain issues which are very complex on account of their multiple ethnic, moral and psychological contents, among others.

Rosalba Todaro, addressing Political Economy of Globalization, emphasized the importance of articulating the gender perspective with the sphere of economy, and the kind of development and issues that have to be privileged, such as the relation between productive and reproductive work in the globalization context.

### Reflections and great challenges.

Along the five working days the reflections focused upon three axes: women's participation spaces; the articulation levels between those women in spaces of power and their organizations; and finally the changes that can be achieved through women's contribution in the institutional and socio-cultural structures, and the deepening of democracy.

It was acknowledged that the quota system is an effective and necessary mechanism that enables women's participation in the institutional spaces of power, however, they should move forward towards the achievement of parity, which implies incorporating this concept into the electoral systems

*It was acknowledged that the quota system is an effective and necessary mechanism that enables women's participation in the institutional spaces of power, however, they should move forward towards the achievement of parity, which implies incorporating this concept into the electoral systems reform processes, in each country.*

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reform processes, in each country.

In this sense, it is essential to debate about the relation between women and power, and the challenge to achieve the recognition of their leadership and visibility as political subjects, overcoming the mere longing for narcissist leadership.

The traditional form of exercising power on the part of the political class and parties was also questioned; they remain the privileged spaces through which institutional power is accessed. Moreover, the need to strengthen new alternatives for political and citizen participation that are emerging in the region was also acknowledged; they contribute to the construction of new agendas for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which include every aspect of diversity.

The main identified challenge was the need to articulate women's and feminist movements' actions and demands for rights, with decision-makers and justice administrators, as well as generating alliances with women who are in those spaces.

An ethical and political challenge for the feminist movement as a socio-political actor seeking to transform power relations is to think from where our societies have been built and rebuilt, rethinking politics as a space for coexistence. In order to give a new value to politics it is necessary

to vindicate its conflictive aspect, as it allows for acknowledging the difference and diversity of the subjectivities living together within our societies.

### Our gains

It is essential to recognize and share the reflection that this meeting resulted in the generation of a learning space for dialogue, where different questions were raised and many approaches to the feminist agenda's issues were posed. The identification of problems in our practices and the analysis of different Latin American realities constituted the starting point for bringing forward new tools for political advocacy, departing from an analysis of the Forum and the issues addressed,

based on the thematic interlinkage. There was a mobilising feeling of belonging to a space of understanding, the identification of peers, and the capacity for exchange that results in mutual growing.

*This article was elaborated by the participants in the Regional Follow up Training Course, composed as follows: DTI 2003 Graduates: Fiorella Benavente, Peru; Angela Collet, Brazil; Joana Chagas, Brazil. DTI 2005 Graduates: Leticia Lázaro, Uruguay; Natalia Mori Cruz, Brazil; Mónica Novillo, Bolivia; Cecilia Ezpeleta, Argentina; Diana Senior, Costa Rica. Other young feminists from the region: Tatiana Hernández, Chile; Natalia Flores, Chile; Carolina Gil, Brazil; Adelaida Entenza, Uruguay; Nicole Bidegain, Uruguay; Patricia Zamora, Chile; Marcela Mazzei, Uruguay.* 

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# DEFENDING OUR DREAMS: GLOBAL FEMINIST VOICES FOR A NEW GENERATION

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**I**t all began with a dream, as it often does. In 2003, Shamillah Wilson and I were having a conversation about a shared dream, one that we'd talked about before: creating an anthology of young feminist theory and practice, combining passion with analysis. As far as we knew, there was no such collection of writing from young feminists across the world, although the generational aspect seemed critical for the future of feminism and women's rights advocacy. The difference this time was that we had the conversation at the first DAWN Training Institute (DTI)



for young feminists, held in Bangalore, and the person we were sharing this dream with, was Peggy Antrobus. As a result, dream became reality in an astonishingly short space of time; a few weeks afterwards, Peggy spoke to Robert Moltano (then editor, Zed Books), who met with Shamillah, and by October 2005 (exactly two years after our first conversation), 'Defending our Dreams: Global Feminist Voices for a New Generation' was launched at AWID's Forum in Bangkok.

So thank you, DAWN, thank you, Peggy. Thank you for the opportunity to make this dream come true, and for creating relationships and an impact that have lasted far beyond the DTI; the anthology itself, for instance, included contributions from two other DTI-ees (Alejandra Scampini and Salma Maoulidi) and a preface by Peggy, and was reviewed, amongst others, by Gita Sen.

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Here is an excerpt from the introduction to the book:

### Why this book?

A friend of ours once said:

As a young Arab woman living in the United States (US), my identity is multiple. Constrained by the limiting US-based notions of identity, I have moved through various categories, but have always had to name myself in reaction to assumptions. In the gaze of the mainstream, as an Arab woman I am oppressed, as an Arab I am inherently violent, and as an immigrant I am suspicious. Most recently, if I am young and Arab, I am dangerous. I feel that until notions of identity are no longer built from ashes of global colonial, military and economic agendas, young people will consistently lose their languages and I will keep on giving geography and history lessons every time I say my name.

We are straddling many complex identities and locations; we are both insider and outsider, rooted in our origins and yet diasporic in our natures. Very often the only way we survive is by using spaces in-between: spaces where we create our own families and communities. Feminist communities have been one such space, where we have flourished and grown. We are a generation of feminists who dream and imagine like those before us, and no doubt, like those after us many other worlds. We defend those dreams in our engagement as advocates, organizers, spokespersons, protesters, researchers, and strategists in social movements across the globe. We believe that our energies, friendship, love, creativity, and passionate advocacy for equality and justice can spark holistic visions, fresh analyses, and new strategies for change. We hope that we will embody our own

visions of leadership of being both follower and leader, of being inspired, and becoming inspiration.

### What is this book?

This book is an attempt to bring together a set of voices from across the world who straddle multiplicity themselves; within the book too, there is a breath-taking range of identities, experiences and issues that are thereby represented. Yet we make no claim to be all-inclusive or all-representative. We are not attempting any geography lessons. We believe these voices will speak for themselves, and possibly others, with clarity and precision, in analysis and in reflection. As far as we are aware, this is the first anthology of its kind an international collection by young feminists from over eleven countries, representing all populated continents and including a piece on male advocates for gender equality by a male feminist (they exist!).

[...]Every article in this anthology explores in different ways, some of the myriad questions that crowd our present global order, and analyses its disorders. Globalization, fundamentalisms, sexualities, financial institutions, new technologies, trafficking, transnational adoption, poverty ... The articles also offer new ways of strategizing around these issues, new spaces for change ... the World Social Forum, radical activist groups and networks, media advocacy, the International Criminal Court, and internet activism. Finally, we end with a call for an old slogan with renewed implications making the personal political is also about making the political, personal. What is our own integrity and accountability, as advocates for feminist justice, for social change, in the ways we theorize and practise? In our strategies and our imaginings? How do we resolve our nightmares? Do we need to defend our dreams? Where do we go from here? 🌟



**D**AWN Informs is published by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) as a networking tool for its members. DAWN is an autonomous inter-regional organization of the South which acts as a network and catalyst advocating alternative development processes that emphasise the basic survival of the world's people, particularly women and children of the South countries.

Subscriptions for printed version: Free to women based in the South. Friends based in the North are asked to make an annual minimum contribution of US\$ 20.00. Please notify any change of address by contacting [info@dawnnet.org](mailto:info@dawnnet.org)

## STEERING COMMITTEE

### **General Coordinator** *Bene E. Madunagu*

Tel: 234-803-2757688

Fax: 234-87-236298

Email: [bene.m@dawnnet.org](mailto:bene.m@dawnnet.org)

### **Former General Coordinator** *Claire Slatter*

Tel: (644) 4764148

Email: [dawngc@infoegen.net.nz](mailto:dawngc@infoegen.net.nz)

### RESEARCH COORDINATORS

#### **Research Coordinator of Political Economy of Globalisation:**

**Gita Sen**

Tel: 91-80-26993076

Email: [gita@iimb.cernet.in](mailto:gita@iimb.cernet.in)

#### **Research Coordinator of Political Economy of Globalisation (Trade):**

**Mariam Williams**

Tel: 561 655 0881

Email: [mariamaw@hotmail.com](mailto:mariamaw@hotmail.com)

#### **Sexual and Reproductive Rights:**

**Sonia Correa**

Tel: (55.21) 2223-10470

Email: [soniacorrea@globo.com](mailto:soniacorrea@globo.com)

#### **Political Restructuring & Social Transformation:**

**Vivienne Taylor**

Tel: 27-21 650 3482

Email: [taylor94@iafrica.com](mailto:taylor94@iafrica.com)

### REGIONAL COORDINATORS

#### **Africa: Anglophone:** *Afua Hesse, Ghana*

Tel: (233) 24 437 0429

Email: [ahesse@ghanatel.com.gh](mailto:ahesse@ghanatel.com.gh)

#### **Africa: Francophone:** *Fatou Sow, Senegal*

Tel: (221-820 03 55)

Email: [fatousow@sentoo.sn](mailto:fatousow@sentoo.sn)

#### **Caribbean:** *Joan Grant-Cummings, Jamaica*

Tel: 876 929 8873

Fax: 876-968-9260

Email: [bracelets59@yahoo.com](mailto:bracelets59@yahoo.com)

#### **Latin America:** *Celita Eccher, Uruguay*

Tel: (+5982) 4080089 / 401

Email: [dawn@repem.org.uy](mailto:dawn@repem.org.uy)

#### **Pacific:** *Yvonne Underhill-Sem, New Zealand*

Tel: (649) 373599 ext. 82311; Fax: (649) 3737411

Email: [y.underhill-sem@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:y.underhill-sem@auckland.ac.nz)

#### **South Asia:** *Kumudini Samuel, Sri Lanka*

Tel: 94-11-2690201

Email: [kumudi@sltnet.lk](mailto:kumudi@sltnet.lk)

#### **South East Asia:** *Gigi Francisco, Philippines*

Telefax: (+63) 2-435 9229

Email: [jfrancisco@mc.edu.ph](mailto:jfrancisco@mc.edu.ph)



DAWN (Development Alternatives with  
Women for a New Era)  
PO Box 3663, UNICAL Post Office  
Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria  
Email: [info@dawnnet.org](mailto:info@dawnnet.org)  
Website: [www.dawnnet.org](http://www.dawnnet.org)

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